

Rebuilding through the Word

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[0 : 00] About 500 years before the Savior of the world was born into a Jewish family of Mary and Joseph, the nation of Israel was still in exile under a foreign ruler.

The city God had provided for His people to live in is in terrible condition. So God raised leaders to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and provide a place and a community where the Savior would be born. He's again working in His world to ensure the redemptive story continues. That is the context behind the book of Nehemiah that we have been looking into during this season.

Chapter 1 to 7 tell us about the external physical rebuilding of the wall. Chapter 8 onward to the end of the book is a spiritual inward rebuilding of the community of the people of God.

Today, we have come to the junctions between these two buildings, these two rebuildings. With the completion of the building on the physical wall, their attentions turn to building up the people of God.

[1 : 16] Their biological heritage is evidenced in the long list of names in Chapter 7, described their lineage to Abraham. Their spiritual heritage emerges as they are taught God's Word from Chapter 8 onward.

The focus of Nehemiah and the hope of the Bible is not on the people or the world that God created, but on the Creator, God, our Heavenly Father Himself.

God is behind every word written in the 66 Old and New Testament books that forms the Bible. God is the author and creator.

He intervenes in human history to ensure His plans come to fruition. God is always preparing for Himself a people of His own.

He rebuilds them through His Word to be a light in the world to show His brilliance and grace. We will look at the preparation and the rebuilding through God's Word today.

[2 : 23] Even though the book of Nehemiah is certainly about God preparing for Himself a community of His people, there is something very unique about this book, because there's not a record of God speaking directly to any of the characters in the book.

It's only at the very beginning there's a short revelation of God's speech. When we read the book of Nehemiah, we should remember that God is the main character, even though He's not speaking directly.

He is the one that set everything into motion. We can see one example of how God works within people to achieve His goal in verse 4 to 5 of chapter 7.

Nehemiah recorded, Now the city was large and spacious, but there were few people in it. And the house had not yet been rebuilt. So my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles, the officials, and the common people for registering by families.

God put into Nehemiah's heart to assemble the people. People's heart is God's working field. It's a heart ready for God's work. God works in the heart of people like Nehemiah and Ezra.

[3 : 44] In the Old Testament, today He's working in our hearts through His word too. God's word is living and active and penetrates our hearts and is influential in building His people.

From chapter 8 onward, we will see the centrality of God's word among His pilgrim people, bringing about necessary changes to prepare them. When we read parts of the Bible that do not record God speaking directly like Nehemiah, we should pay extra attention to avoid missing some fundamental principle to how God prepares for His work.

One of the principles I will draw your attention to will make me very unpopular in the common day and age. What I'm referring to is there must be a distinction between who is and who is not part of God's family.

There needs to be a sense of exclusivity before we can have a real sense of belonging within a true community of God's people. Knowing who truly belongs and who is just an attendee is very

important to community formation.

There must be a clear commitment for God's people and community to impact where God has placed them. For them is Jerusalem.

[5 : 09] For us is Chesterwood in the city of Willoughby. In chapter 7, there's a long list of names of those that can legitimately claim their places within a community of God's people.

However, a group in the list cannot show their family descended from Israel. Some names should not surprise us because of what they did up to this point in the book.

If you look into verse 61 of chapter 7, The following come from the tribe of Talmala, Talhasha, Kareb, Abdon, and Imah.

But they could not show their family were descended from Israel, the descendants of De'alaha, Tobiah, and Nekodah. Tobiah is one of the troublemakers that applied many times during the rebuilding work.

During last week's sermon, Steve pointed out that even Tobiah, even his name means God is good. Tobiah did not believe the meaning of his name and set out to discredit God and oppose his works.

[6 : 21] Verse 46 says, These searchers for their family records, but they could not find them, and so were excluded from the priesthood as unclean. The governor therefore ordered them not to eat any of the most sacred food until there should be a priest ministering with a umar and sermon.

We can all agree that not allowing those who do not genuinely have the good of the people in their hearts to hold leadership position is crucial.

There are many examples of how things have gone badly in the Bible and human history because the exclusion was not applied.

You only need to look into your workplace or your friends and families and relatives to see the damage a self-centered, self-praising person would make.

They are alone where the dead person is leading. And so they are excluded from the priesthood, the position of spiritual leaders, and from enjoying the privilege entitled.

[7 : 28] But it must be clear that they are not excluded from the community, but are banned from holding leadership position until God provides a suitable way to identify them adequately.

God is rebuilding a community that will represent Him to the world, and only those ready to represent His reign are qualified to serve and lead His people spiritually.

God's people need to be identifiable, stand up to be counted, and are committed to God and His work in Nehemiah's time, even more so for us today.

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[9 : 05] How can we be sure we are growing in our faith as a disciple of God? Jesus said to the Jews who believe in Him in John 8, 31, If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciple.

Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. One of the essential measurements we can use is God's Word, His teaching and His truth.

Nehemiah could discern the scheme of his opposition because he knows God's Word. He leaves his reference towards God and a healthy sense of fear because he knows God's Word.

And he often stopped and pondered on God's Word. Some other helpful question would be, Who are you living for or serving with your life?

Who or what is the treasure of your life? Are you treasuring Jesus and adoring Him together with other disciples?

[10 : 07] Or is something else getting most of your attention? Do you worship God corporately in gatherings and personally in devotional reading of His Word?

Or are you a part of a community that builds disciples' relationship and serves others with their life? God is rebuilding a community of His own people.

It is vital to distinguish who truly belongs to Him to ensure that His name and His brilliant works of salvation reveal to all nations. As preparation, we need to note those not wholeheartedly contributing to the rebuilding work of God to ensure that bad influence will not hinder other people's growth.

The majestic God reveals all necessary for life and salvation in His Word. It is how He builds His people and church. Our hearts are where God is at work every day.

So your attitude towards God's Word is a good indicator of what's going on and happening within you. The people in Nehemiah's time demonstrated an eagerness to hear God's Word in chapter 8,

verse 1-2.

[11:28] After they have settled into the city, all the people came together as one in the square before the water gate. They told Ezra, the teacher of the law, to bring out the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel.

So on the first day of the seventh month, Ezra, the priest, brought out the law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand.

On that day, all the people listened attentively to the book of the law from daybreak till noon.

Teenagers, younger kids too, all who can understand.

They listened with reference. They built a wooden platform to excel God's Word. Verse 5-6 say, the people praise and worship God at the opening of God's Word.

Reading the Bible, the Word of the Great God, is a form of worship. Sadly, many people, or many of us, only worship God on Sunday in a building and do not worship by reading into God's Word.

[12:42] Reading the Bible has become something they must do to ensure God is pleased with them. They will try very hard to do it every day, often at the end of the day, just before they went to sleep.

The attitude of the people gathered at Nehemiah's time is not like that. They want to understand what is being read, so they break into small groups to read God's Word, allowing the leaders to make the clear to them in verse 7-8.

Referent, awe, and worship flowed throughout the assembly as they read and got to understand God's Word. Is that what you are experiencing with God's Word while reading on your own during the week or sitting at church on Sunday?

What feeling do you usually have towards the Word of God? What weight does the Word bring to bear on you? I think the end of verse 9 is not far from reality as our typical responses to the Word of God.

It says, for all the people have been weeping as they listen to the words of the Lord. They can be tears of joy as we realize the death of God's love for us, but they are often tears of conviction as we recognize the distance between our way of living and our commitment to God's Word.

[14:10] The people in Nehemiah's time weep and grieve because they were convicted. In the New Testament, just after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, the people of God gathered and heard Peter preach about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

They were also convicted. And when the people heard this, they were cut to their heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, Brother, what should we do? The people in Acts responded better because their conviction makes them willing to take action.

However, Nehemiah and the leaders say to people in verse 9 to 11, This day is holy to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep. Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks and send some to those who have nothing prepared.

This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve for the joy of the Lord is your strength. Be still for this is a holy day. Do not grieve.

They repeat it three times, This day is holy. Which time side they are telling them to have a holiday? How would they be appropriate when someone is convicted of their sin?

[15:22] It is because this day is holy to the Lord. God wants us to be convicted of our sin but does not want us to stay in our sin.

They should grieve no more because the joy of the Lord is their strength. If you can go back one slide, please. In other words, don't let your tears be your strength.

Don't let your grief be your strength. The joy of the Lord is your strength which means being satisfied in the Lord. Then, verse 12, all the people went away to eat and drink to send a portion of food and to celebrate with great joy because they now understood the word that had been made known to them.

People have incredible joy and deep satisfaction because of the words that have been made known to them. God's word has sunk in and taken root in their hearts and now they understood them.

They understood that if God could rebuild the wall in 52 days, they could transform them and cleanse them from all sins. They understood that God already forgives them. Because they know they are forgiven, they can worship and have satisfaction in the living King their Lord.

[16:49] The opposite would be true if God's word only grieves you. If listening to God's word only causes further worry that you cannot fulfill God's requirement.

If you have a heavy heart and feel that all being said from the Bible is easier than done, a sense of self-pity, you have not fully understood his words because you have not become sorrowful as God intended and you were driven further away from God by your conviction.

Paul comforted the Corinthians church after his very strong letter and in his second letter, 2 Corinthians 7-10, he said, Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret.

When God convicts you of your sin, he wants you to focus on repentance and as you repent of your sins, you will have a deep sense of satisfaction knowing God is working to transform and save you. This is the same essence of the teaching of James in James 1-25. Do not merely listen to the word and so anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and after looking at it goes away and immediately forget what he looks.

[18:15] But whoever looks intending into the perfect law that gives freedom and continuing not forgetting what he has heard but doing it, they will be blessed in what they do.

Make the necessary change you have learned from God's word and you will experience the same death of joy as those people in Nehemiah as God rebuilds your life through his word.

You will experience the blessed freedom that Jesus' gospel promised a deep satisfaction. A couple days ago it was the 11th day of the 11th month.

Historically and traditionally in the West is a date of remembrance. The hostility of World War I formally ended at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918.

But that was 104 years ago. Most people impacted directly by the war, by this World War have not passed. And sadly the events that replaced this momentous day tells a lot about the failure our city and our society holds.

[19:26] In China, with the day having so many ones, it has been commercialized to represent a single state. Bypassing the hope that single people will find their other half to complete the life.

The concept that someone needs to get married and have children to represent a blessed life is worth another sermon. In Australia, when November comes, we're reminded of the race that stopped the nation.

Once that is done, we are bombarded with advertisement that feeds our FOMO, our fear of missing out. Regarding an online shopping event, that will stop the nation once again a week after the race. We live in an environment with information overload that fights for our attention. We often end up remembering or being reminded of things that are not important.

But remembering the essential is vital for our existence. Remembering the right thing was also vital for the people in Nehemiah's time.

[20:42] And they have been reminded of something that they have neglected. They have not celebrated the festival of the booth, or the festival of the tabernacle, as stipulated by God since God settled them into the promised land.

In chapter 8, verse 17, towards the end, it says, from the days of Joshua, son of Nun, until that day, that Israel had not celebrated it like this.

So why is the festival vital to their existence? What is the meaning behind this festival for them? And is this relevant to us?

We're told in brief what they need to do in chapter 8, verse 13 to 16. If you go to Numbers 29, 12 to 40, and Leviticus 23, 33 to 43, there's a much more detail of the meaning of the festival.

But I'll try to summarize for you. After the harvest, each year, the people of God, Israel, are to live in booths, temporary tents, for eight days, to remember that God has led them through the wilderness after he redeems them out of Egypt.

[22:04] The idea was to point back to when Israel experienced God's faithfulness. It reminds them of all the sins and grumbling that God had put up with over that time and how gracious God had been to them even so by providing harvest in due time.

They were to remember how God has saved them every year so they will remain grateful and faithful to the creator that provided everything. They were also to remember that God chose them to be the light of the world to point people back to him.

The people in Nehemiah's time got into all sort of troubles and grief because they did not remember who God was and who they were. And they were restless and insecure.

The festival is God's way of saying remember me. Remember where you come from and who has been looking after you all your life. God is their ultimate security and rest.

He is also our ultimate security and rest. In our day and age when we are also restless and tempted to forget God's goodness we need to remember that God is the origin and source of our life.

[23 : 27] Only when we remember God has always been looking after us and get back to a relationship with God can we truly say we are living out the ultimate purpose of human existence.

You will only find true freedom and deep joy for your life in remembrance and reference of God. If you are not yet a worshiper of the great God and want to find out more, please let me know.

I would love to help you to become part of God's rebuilding community. community. If you consider yourself part of God's community, let's join together.

In rejoicing that you have God's work to build our life on and God is always working in our hearts to transform us. through the la vol brought into in that Kita puis, we