

Monday Evening - English

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[0 : 00] I'm going to keep in mind the passage we read in 1 Corinthians 12, but I want us to turn this evening to Nehemiah chapter 11. Nehemiah chapter 11.

Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms. It's on page 485. As you find Nehemiah 11, let me just give you a very brief introduction.

Nehemiah was the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. He was working in the citadel of Susa when he got the news from his brother that Jerusalem's walls had been broken down and the gates had been burned with fire.

And Nehemiah's response was to fall down and weep, to kneel down and pray, and then to get up and work. He ends up in Jerusalem to lead this building project of the walls.

And the building begins overcoming enemies, overcoming grumbling, overcoming stealing within the Israelites themselves. Eventually, in just 52 days, the walls are rebuilt.

[1 : 19] And we come this evening to Nehemiah chapter 11. And we come where they are dedicating the walls of Jerusalem.

Let me read the first few verses. Now the leaders of the people lived in Jerusalem. And the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while nine out of ten remained in the other towns.

And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem. These are the chiefs of the province who lived in Jerusalem.

And you can flick over the page and see in the indents of the passage through chapter 11 of the priests and the list of the priests.

And in verse 15, the Levites and the list of all the Levites. And 19, the gatekeepers. And so on, all the way to verse 26 of chapter 12.

[2 : 32] So you may be relieved this evening that I'm not going to read, or I'm relieved that I'm not going to read all of these names to you at this point. But I want us to consider this evening this passage, Nehemiah chapter 11.

My wife, Ailey, last summer, she graduated in Edinburgh. And it was a memorable occasion for many reasons. Of course, because of all that she achieved.

And many of you have been in this situation before at one of these big universities and graduation ceremonies. One of the reasons this was so memorable was because of the length of time that I sat there and watched almost 500 students come up onto the stage and receive their awards quite rightly, and then come back down.

The list of names went on and on and on. And, if I'm honest, it became quite tedious and monotonous until, of course, it came to Ailey and we all perked up and cheered her off the stage. Well, that list of names is quite like when we come to a passage in the Bible as Nehemiah chapter 11 with just name after name. You know, we know it is part of the Bible.

[4 : 03] But is there really material here for a sermon? On the Monday night of communion, is there material here for a sermon? Well, if you're familiar with Nehemiah at all, then you will know that there are several chapters like this throughout the book with just name after name.

Again, this list in chapter 11, as we just said, it goes all the way to verse 26 of chapter 12. So, who's interested in this? Who cares about these names?

Well, sure, the next generation or two may have had some interest in knowing these names and who served where and who did what. And we get that because you're interested in your own family tree.

You're interested to know where you've come from, who you belong to. Is your line coming from the Vikings or from the royal family? Usually the Vikings.

You know, just in the passing, as we come here, this list of names, it shows us something quite striking.

[5 : 16] It shows us that all of our appearance on this earth is fleeting. We are all largely unremarkable.

We know our grandparents' names, perhaps our great-grandparents, but what about after that? To even go back one or two centuries, the names in even just our own family tree become a bit blurry. Who was my granny's great-granny? Nehemiah chapter 11. It may just be a list of names to us, but every single name on this list before you and over the page and into chapter 12, every name is known and is important to God.

These are the unsung heroes of the faith. There are hundreds of them up and down our country, up and down the land, and here, in this town, in this congregation too.

They know their calling. They know their role, and they don't want to be patted on the back for doing it. These people, like those names in our list here, they are recorded not because of the spectacular, but because they are resolutely committed to the basics.

[6 : 47] If you want a title for this evening, it is Back to Basics. We break into the story of Nehemiah. Once all the major building work has been accomplished.

Jerusalem has now been rebuilt. The temple was in action. The walls and gates have been restored. She was now, once again, a beautiful and a fortified city.

But there is an issue. Chapter 7, verse 4 makes this clear. Nobody was living there. Nobody lived in the city. As we read at the beginning of chapter 11, Nehemiah sought to do something about that. The leaders resettled there. But it did not seem a very popular option for anybody else to go. And so one out of every ten would come.

You see, they liked living where they were. Perhaps in their own villages on the outskirts. Maybe the land was fertile. Their families were settled. But in verse 1, we see that the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of every ten to live in Jerusalem.

[8 : 00] So some came, leaving behind everything that was familiar and comfortable. And they took up their new dwelling in the holy city of Jerusalem.

The city, they roughly guess, was inhabited now by about 10,000 people. Now what I want to do this evening, through chapter 11, is to mingle through the crowd and ask those that we will come into contact with, what are you doing here?

What do you do here in this city, in God's city of Jerusalem? What is your role here? I want us to hear the responses from four different people.

Let's, first of all, walk through then in the streets of Jerusalem. And we can ask this first individual, looking at verse 2, what are you doing here?

The response in verse 2, I am living here. I am living in Jerusalem. Doesn't sound very dramatic or effective.

[9 : 20] What marks you out? What benefit are you to the city? You just live here. The people had been commended for just living there.

They were admired because they took their place to reestablish the community and to maintain the city just by being there.

some of us may think, I don't really have a role here in this church. I'm just here.

I just show up. you know, for a start, that is so good and it is so important.

If you weren't here tonight, who would be sitting in that pew? there would be an empty space. Who would the person next to you this evening be sitting beside?

[10 : 25] Nobody. Some of you are sitting next to a space. There are empty pews because, for whatever reason, some people said they would be here, but they aren't.

some because of illness, some because of work, some because of travel, some because of sin, some because they have wandered from the path.

We need faithful people just to live out their commitment in the ordinary mainstream of life to simply maintain the work of God in this place.

It is a steady and faithful commitment to the basics which makes the world go round and, in our context, makes this church function as she is meant to.

You know, showing up is the most basic activity that any of us can engage in. Your appearance, here in this church, Sunday by Sunday, is so important and it is so felt by your brothers and sisters here.

[11 : 53] Some people's attendance, it's not guaranteed each week. We wondered if some will be here or not. But this church in Stornoway, it functions and goes on because there are men and women who are faithfully committed to showing up.

How much of the past week or the week to come or the month that we've been through has been marked out by spectacular, out of the ordinary, remarkable events?

not a lot, if any at all. This has been, I'm sure, a routine week for most of us.

We've been engaged in the normal, same old stuff, same old alarm, same old car, same old work, same old school, same old shops.

It's been the usual, nothing very often out of the ordinary. For most of us, our calling in this life is not to become world famous preachers or missionaries that are spoken of in every seminary up and down the land or donators to feed and shelter the poor in far-flung countries.

[13 : 23] For most of us, we are being called to make a difference in the basic, routine activities in the everyday life of this church.

What do you do here? We asked, what is your role? I live here. I show up. I attend faithfully to the means of grace.

I am a committed member of Christ and his church and here in my local church.

We can move on through the crowd and ask the next person. We see, what do you do here? In verse 11 and 12, what do you do here?

The response we get is, I work here. You see, there are these 822 men who did the work of the house of God.

[14 : 25] So we meet this individual. This man is just one of 822. He can't be very significant. Surely not very important.

No, he would say, I just work here. We may think well if one of these men doesn't show up then the work will continue.

And that may be true, but together the 822 are mentioned and they're recorded by Nehemiah because they get their job done.

Consistently they are doing their part. parts. It may be that if one or two didn't show then the work would go on.

But what if 20 or 200 didn't show up? Then we would have a problem. The 822 they are the full complement and together they keep the work in the temple in the Lord's house.

[15 : 35] They keep it going. Each one has a sense of purpose, a sense of belonging, a sense of team, a sense of commitment.

Whether the work is big or small, extravagant or apparently insignificant, these men are recorded because they committed themselves to the essential and yet unflamboyant establishing, maintaining, and caring of God's house.

And next to them in verse 16 is another worker who says I am serving. In verse 16 Shabbathai and Josephad the chiefs of the Levites who were over the outside work of the house of God.

It doesn't sound a big deal doing some jobs around the church. Is it a big deal? Well, it's a big deal when somebody's on the roof for two days, clearing moss off it.

It's a big deal when salt is spread on the pavements so that nobody slips on the ice and ends up in hospital on their way to church. It's a big deal when you turned up for church this evening and found the door to be open and not shut because none of the men wanted to be on door duty.

[17 : 11] We tend to think that the public duties, the upfront roles to be the ones that we ought to get excited about and want for ourselves.

But that's why we read 1 Corinthians 12. Paul is speaking about the church, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable and the parts we think are less honorable we treat with special honor and the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty.

There's many congregations that I've been to and been into their vestry and they have on the wall in ascending or maybe descending pictures of all of their ministers through history and that's good, it's fine, there's nothing wrong with that.

But Jesse's picture isn't there or Ishmael's picture isn't there or fill in the blank yourselves. The ministers were resident for 5, 10, maybe 20 years sometimes.

Jesse or whoever has been there her whole life baptized, gone to Sunday school, professed her faith, opened her home for fellowships, made cups of tea, brings baking, visited housebound ladies, quietly serving the Lord and his church for her whole life.

[18 : 53] Now she or he does not want to be, does not need or deserve an award from her Kirk session because she will receive her reward from her heavenly fathers.

Are you willing to be totally invisible for the sake of the kingdom of Christ? Not to be the one who receives the praise, the one who people take note of.

Are you willing to do the essential and perhaps unflamboyant work in Christ's church? What do you do here?

I work here. I serve Jesus here. The third person we can ask as we come to verse 17.

What do you do here? They reply, I pray here. Mataniah, the director who led in thanksgiving and prayers.

[19 : 59] His role was to pray. Whatever else was going on in the city, whether they were building or defending or decision making, Mataniah was to be found in prayers.

prayers. And he was calling others to prayer as well. Whatever else goes on in the life of this congregation, ministries, conversions, disappointments, challenges, may you be found in prayers. See, if you had a burden or a difficulty, you could come to Mataniah and you would pray together. Whenever you'd see him, he'd ask you how you were and he'd pray for you.

Isn't it staggering to think about those who have been and are praying for you before you were ever converted? People in this church, people in your families, they've been praying for you.

And even now there are prayer warriors who lift up your life and your family's lives to God's throne that he would sustain you.

[21 : 23] We might not know them, we might not know that they do it. What's important is that God knows them and he hears them.

Prayers that parents or grandparents made but never saw them answered on this earth. in the Lord's timing, he answered them.

Prayers that you may make even this evening, you may never hear them or see them answered but leave it to the Lord. Is it true of you or me that we could be called prayer warriors?

prayers? That we would lead others to prayer as well? Do you have a prayer list physically or mentally that you turn to daily and bring certain individuals before the Lord?

Are you praying for anyone right now to be saved by Jesus Christ? I hope so. Do you believe that Jesus Christ can save them?

[22 : 35] I hope so because if we do not believe it, we may as well stop praying. And will we give thanks to the Lord when we see in whatever way our prayers answered?

You know, a praying church will make the difference in this town, in this community between it being useful or useless.

You pray together on Wednesday, Thursday nights. Come and pray with your family. The last person that will ask, what do you do here as we walk through the street of Jerusalem?

In verse 22, we sing here, they say, Uzziah was one of the singers responsible for the service of the house of God.

I sometimes, in my own congregation, look out at those before me when they're singing. singing. I remember in one of my first ever times sitting at the Lord's table in Kenneth Street and just taking it in as you sang around me at the Lord's table.

[24 : 05] I'm sure most of us have been to stadiums or whether concerts or football matches places where thousands of people have gathered to belt out their favorite songs.

And yet, for me anyway, there is nothing quite like coming here this evening and seeing you singing praise to God, your God, he who has gone all, who has sent his Son, Jesus Christ, who has gone all the way to the end of the road, to gather you, to bring you home, so that this evening you would be singing praise to his name.

We all have different situations, different burdens in our own lives, many hurdles perhaps came in your way from even coming here this evening, coming to church, but you're here.

And like in no other place, at no other time, you open your mouth, however beautiful you think it is or isn't, it is a miracle for the sinner who has been saved to sing to their Savior.

It is a miracle for the sinner who has been saved to sing to their Savior. There's a school of thought that these particular Levites here in verse 22 onwards were the great grandchildren of King David, the singing boy, the author of so many of the Psalms.

[25 : 58] And now down through the generations, leading the praise in God's house was his offspring. Well, whether it was or wasn't, it doesn't matter because I would not be, and I know that

there are those, even in the pews, some of you this evening, who are sitting with generations of your family, side by side, praising God together.

us. And I may break the heart of some of you whose prayer for parents or husbands or wives, children that have not been answered yet.

But don't let it discourage you, but be encouraged to see that nothing is impossible with God. And keep praying.

what do you do here? We sing praise to God here. Well, as you read through this list in chapter 11 and into 12, we notice that nobody is described by their personality.

It wasn't their faces that we remember about these particular Jews in Jerusalem. We can even try and imagine, but we can't.

[27 : 23] Was he tall? Was he short? Was he bald? Was he old? Was he young? Did he have black hair or blonde hair? It doesn't matter. We're not told these details.

What matters here is not their faces, but it is their function. The memory of the righteous is blessed to us, not because of what they looked like, but because of who they believed in, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

They stick out in our memory because of their love for their Lord and their love for the Lord's people. Love God, love God's people.

You know, whatever your role is in this church, church, whether you are the minister or elder or deacon, member or on the tees or on the door or on the creche or a prayer warrior or for a start a regular attender.

May each of us be known for our service to the King of Kings. The people in this list and all of you in this building are not striving to be famous but we are striving to be faithful to God.

[28 : 54] Somebody may look back in a hundred years or however long at the communion role of Stormway Free Church and they may wonder what was he like?

What did she do? Or we may hardly be remembered. Maybe nobody will look. But you know God is looking and he cares.

All of the roles and responsibilities that we've covered this evening, they should describe all of us, all of them, right here and right now.

Because we live here, you live here, you are faithfully committed to this place and to showing up week by week.

You work here, whatever you do, whatever you can do, preach, teach, visit, pour tea, open doors, throw salt.

[30 : 03] I will work knowing that every member makes up the body of Christ's church. You pray here. If you are not already, you want to become prayer warriors for this church and this community and you sing here.

You will join in the chorus of praise, standing side by side with neighbours, with family, with now your church family, proclaiming praises to God for the miracle of salvation that he has done in each one of us.

So these roles and responsibilities are for us right here, right now, but each of these roles and responsibilities are true of every one of us when we will get to heaven.

We are going to live there forever. We are going to work there. It will not be laborious work, perhaps like some of you engaged in today, but we will continue to serve the Lord.

We will be praying in glory. We will communicate with our hearts to God forever and ever. We will most certainly be singing there.

[31 : 31] What a sound that will be. when we join in with the angelic choir and we worship he, he who was on that middle cross, he who is now sitting on his throne.

I live here, I work here, I pray here, I sing praise to God here and all for his glory.

Amen. Amen. Let's pray. Oh Lord, our God, we thank you for your church, we thank you that though there are many members, that there is one body and Lord, whatever we can do, let us do it for your glory.

and Lord, we pray for this church and every member and person apart of it, from the youngest to the oldest, that you would unite them and use them and that they may be throughout this town reaching and sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So Lord, lead us on, help us as we go into this week, go back to our works, our homes, help us to be the salt and the light, wherever you're going to lead us.

[32 : 59] We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.