



HG235: Nehemiah - Be Determined
Wall To Wall Workers

Nehemiah 3:1-32

Home Group Study Notes

13 February 2022 - James Van Cleef



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group
with you, along with any previous notes and other
resources which might be helpful for your discussions.*



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

If you had music played every time you entered a room, what would it be, and why?



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



HG235: Nehemiah - Be Determined **Wall To Wall Workers**

Nehemiah 3:1-32

Home Group Sermon Notes

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When reading Nehemiah 3, you are presented with an opportunity. You can skip it, or read through it very quickly - it appears to be an administrator's record of names and the work accomplished. It does not compare with the great stories and passages of Scripture, and you will never find any part of it quoted in greeting cards. But if you do skip it or read it quickly, you may well miss the opportunity before you: read, and look for analogy, and you will see a calling and challenge for the contemporary people of God.

The Vision

The people of Israel had been exiled because of their habitual rejection of God, from the golden calf, to not believing God was with them, to doing evil in the eyes of the Lord, to demanding a king to rule instead of God (so they could be like the other nations), to rejecting the prophets. Moses was right, they were a stiff-necked people!

We must remember that God's use of exile as discipline was restorative. He did not abandon his people; he gave them over to the consequence of their habitual rejection of God and sin. And in that strange land, they were forced to consider how to be God's people amongst a people who did not know God. And they had to do so without the certainties that gave them identity: their king, their temple, their priests, their sacrifices. The dawning realisation that these old certainties were no longer of any use led them to learn new ways to connect with God.

Seventy years in a strange land, sitting by the rivers of Babylon being taunted by what used to be (see Psalm 137), leads them to the beginnings of renewed vision: How should we live before God? What needs to change in us? How can we be faithful to God's call?

They had to learn afresh what God desired from the beginning: a relationship of mutual love, of mutual giving and receiving, a way of life that reflected the glorious Trinity in whose image humankind was created. Too often the relationship offered by the blessed Trinity was—and is—exchanged for the piffle of religion, the delusion of power, and the blinding arrogance of self-righteousness. Israel had walked that road, and lost touch with God.

Now it is time for a different path, and God declares mercy through the prophet Isaiah:

'Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins' (Isaiah 40.1-2).

And also through the prophet Jeremiah:

'Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfil to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope' (Jeremiah 29.10-11).

All Scripture Is Useful?

We love those words from Isaiah and Jeremiah, but we probably quote from Nehemiah 3 never. So if all scripture is useful (see 2 Timothy 3.16) how is Nehemiah 3, written probably near the fourth century BC, useful for us in the 21st century? There are some significant differences between *then* and *now* that surely must mean we don't need to bother...

They were returning from a seventy year exile

We are not...

They had a common purpose to rebuild the walls and gates of Jerusalem

Billericay is not walled, nor does it have gates...

They faced threat and persecution to accomplish the task God had given them

We do not face threats or persecutions as we work to accomplish God's will...

Maybe that's why Nehemiah 3 is likely skipped, because it bears no resemblance to our life today.

But in skipping it we may also be neglecting important lessons, for there are actual similarities between *them* and *us*.

We—*them* and *us*—are disciples who share a common purpose of giving witness to God. We have a unity in purpose that comes from God. We—*them* and *us*—are different, and yet despite our differences know that we are somehow one.

That They May Be One ...

Within the story of Nehemiah, we see a unity of mind and intention in the builders of the wall in response to Nehemiah's vision. Nehemiah 2.18 bears this out: *'Then they said, 'Let us start building!' So they committed themselves to the common good.'* The success of the project needed the leadership of Nehemiah, certainly, but also the response of the people awakened and united by God's vision. Their unity of mind came because God had initiated this plan; it was God's call that the wall be rebuilt. It was God's plan that the people return to Jerusalem. And because they knew it was God's plan, they believed he would give them success.

How does this apply to us? Church history, and that of Israel, seems to be marked more by division than unity. Division occurs when there is loss of vision, loss of identity, and loss of humility, all of which are the opposite of what we find in Jesus and Scripture:

'The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light' (Matthew 6.22)

'Where there is no prophecy, the people cast off restraint' (Proverbs 29.18)

'You did not choose me but I chose you' (John 15.6)

'He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world...' (Ephesians 1.4)

'Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 18.4)

'Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who...emptied himself' (Philippians 2.5, 7)

Disunity in the church is sadly too common, and it perpetuates a faulty witness. Happily, there is a way to resolve that problem. It promises to be revitalising, powerful, and a guaranteed success. But it is costly. The way is to have the mind of Christ among us. The way is to let Christ be arbiter in our decisions. The way is for the Church to submit to the head, who is Christ.

How is this costly? First, it means that we have to set our agendas aside. Our agendas may be good, laudable, and proper. But are they in line with Jesus? When we gather around Jesus Christ, and allow him to be the head of the Church, then the Spirit works within us and moves us, challenging and softening our hearts. We then end up with unanimity in the Church because we have submitted our selves to Jesus.

It is costly, secondly, because it takes longer to come to this unity. The Spirit is at work, but how long does it take us to align our wills to his? If we get impatient in church meetings that look like they may last more than two hours, how will we cope if we have to wait for a few weeks for people to fall in line with the Spirit?

Here's a scenario: the DCC discussed plans for karaoke mission. There were people for and against, with some being indifferent. Plans, budgets, opinions, questions and objections were aired. After 45 minutes, it was put to a vote and passed by a majority of one. Now we know this was the right decision because God's wisdom was invoked at the start. But what about the views of absent DCC members? What about the church members? That doesn't matter, because there was a majority in the DCC. Of course, there will be those who can't stand karaoke mission and think it's a terrible idea, and they will continue hating karaoke mission and thinking it's a terrible idea. Result: disunity.

The Body of Christ is not a democratic institution; it is the living embodiment of Christ, who is the head. Democracy, a human construct, too often leads the church to acquiesce to human agenda over against the Kingdom of God. Unity comes only as we submit wholly to Christ, with our minds and wills being transformed by his. *'Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect'* (Romans 12.2). To have our minds renewed by the Spirit is genuine repentance, and leads to genuine unity.

Unity Nourishes Diversity

The other crucial lesson in this story is this: unity nourishes diversity. The Israelites willingness to embrace God's call regardless of who they were meant that everyone became responsible for Jerusalem's wall. It wasn't left to the professional stonemasons and carpenters. The 'builders' were priests, nobles, ordinary men, daughters of local rulers, goldsmiths, perfumers, local authorities, Levites, people from outside of Jerusalem, and merchants. This diversity was centred in the call of God, and though each took responsibility for their section of wall, as a united people, they all built the wall.

Let's apply this. What does this mean for us? Unity in Christ gives foundation for diversity within the Body of Christ. And this is how: individually, we find our true identity in Jesus. We are fully who we are to be in him. I am fully who I am to be in him. And so are you. But you don't become me, and I don't become you. We each are fully alive in and through Jesus Christ who gives of his Spirit to glorify the Father.

'Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it ... Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way'
(1 Corinthians 12.27, 29-31).

In our diversity of personality and gifting, we are bound by the love of God in Jesus Christ. Our unity is found in Jesus, and as we are one with him, he is one with us, and we are one with each other. Take away our unity in Jesus, and we split into factions, pursue personal agendas, and we become blind, disconnected, and arrogant.

Finally, within the Church, we each have a share in the strengthening of the Body of Christ, of being responsible one for the other. In the NT, you will not find a distinction between clergy and laypeople, between those who 'do' ministry, and those to whom ministry is 'done'. You will only find God's people who have been called to bear with one another in love, who are charged with maintaining the unity of the Spirit, for we all are children of one Father, and the outpouring of his Spirit empowers us for the building up of the body of Christ (see Ephesians 4.1-16).

You. I. Us. In the power of the Holy Spirit.

See what you might miss if you skip Nehemiah 3! Amen.

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Emmanuel Church Text for 2022

*“But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever,
the purposes of His heart through all generations.”*

Psalm 33:11



Looking Upwards (40 mins)

Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1. The workers knew the vision to build the wall was from God, and so they were united to see God's purposes accomplished. How can we discern whether 'vision' is from God or not?

2. Not everyone was wholehearted in their support for Nehemiah (Nehemiah 3.5). Is disagreement inevitable in the church? How should it be resolved?

3. Disunity is the result of loss of vision, loss of identity, and loss of humility. What part are we to play in making sure we maintain our vision, know our identity, and live in humility?

4. Using 1 Corinthians 12-13 and Ephesians 4.1-16, discuss the statement, ‘unity nourishes diversity.’

5. Nehemiah was a cupbearer to the king, he became a great visionary leader and project manager because he was open to God and ready to be the answer to his prayers. Do you believe God would choose to use you? Do you believe he would choose to use you in preference to someone else?

6. The wall building wasn’t left to stonemasons alone. Everyone built the wall. With that in mind, and knowing that in the New Testament there is no distinction between ‘clergy’ and ‘laypeople’ how will you continue to minister to the body of Christ? How will you work to ‘build the wall’?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

Emmanuel Church, Laindon Road, Billericay, Essex. CM12 9LD

P 01277 632120 E Emmanueloffice@billericaychurches.org W Emmanuel-church.info
FB Emmanuel Church Billericay T EmmanuelCM12 YT Emmanuel Church Billericay

Part Of The Billericay & Little Burstead Team Ministry