

I Thought We Were Finished?

Nehemiah 7

So far in the book of Nehemiah we have seen the Jewish remnant focused on rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem. It would have been very easy to think that building a wall was the remnant's mission. Building the wall was a tremendous assignment. But Nehemiah knew that it was only an assignment. It was not the whole mission. The mission of the remnant was to be a witness for God to the nations. That has always been God's mission for God's people. When God first called the Hebrew people to be His own possession, He chose a man named Abram in Genesis 12. And the LORD said to Abram:

"Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house,
To a land that I will show you.

2 I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name
great; And you shall be a blessing.

3 I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you;
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

God has always had a heart for the nations. His purpose has always been to bless people with a relationship with Himself. And God uses these people to reach others. That is God's mission.

So the mission of the remnant was to be a witness for God to the nations. God told them to do that by standing as a unique nation. Their distinctiveness as God's people was to be on display in the city of Jerusalem by the way they lived and worked and worshipped. The first assignment in renewing that witness to the nations was the rebuilding of the wall. In a completely miraculous way, God worked through Nehemiah and the remnant to get the wall built in just 52 days. Nehemiah 6:16 shows the impact this had on the nations around them, **"And it happened, when all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations around us saw these things, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God."**

So could they sit back now and say, "mission accomplished"? No! Their mission had only just begun. Just like our mission here as a church isn't done. God has blessed this church with completing many successful assignments. But every accomplishment we have... every victory we win... every step along the way... is just a step in accomplishing our mission of fulfilling the Great Commission. Our mission is clear. Jesus gave it to his believers, the church in Matthew 28:19-20:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the
name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
20 "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and
lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

And just like with Nehemiah and the remnant, every successful assignment should cause us to do three things.

I. Review the Present Reality (7:1-3).

First, it should cause us to review the present reality. Look at how Nehemiah did that in verses 1-3:

7:1 Then it was, when the wall was built and I had hung the doors, when the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed,

2 that I gave the charge of Jerusalem to my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the leader of the citadel, for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many.

3 And I said to them, "Do not let the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot; and while they stand guard, let them shut and bar the doors; and appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, one at his watch station and another in front of his own house."

Every time we have success, we need to review the present reality. Can you imagine what a relief it must have been to have finished the wall? Think about all of the hard work that they had done. Think of all the sacrifice. Think of all the blood and sweat that went into those 52 days. Really, it was even longer than that for Nehemiah. That wall had been the only thing on his mind for at least six months. It had been the main thrust of his prayers. It had caused him to change locations. It had caused him to change lifestyles. It had caused him to change careers. His whole life had changed because of that wall. And so had the people's. But now they were done. The wall was built. The last thing to be accomplished was to hang the doors in the gates. And that was done. Singers had been appointed for the celebration. The Levites were appointed to offer sacrifices of praise. They were done! But as a leader, Nehemiah knew that just because the assignment was finished, the mission wasn't complete. He knew that the wall was just one step along the way in accomplishing the mission that God had for the remnant. And because of that, he kept his eye on the present reality of their situation.

Nehemiah establishes three priorities here to deal with the reality their present situation.

A. There was a physical need of protection.

Nehemiah realized that there was a need of regular supervision of the city's main entrances. The entrances would need to have guards and watchmen. So he appoints gatekeepers. Later in this book, we will see that these guards will be entrusted with moral responsibilities as well. They will be asked to keep the gates closed on the Sabbath. The physical protection will also include a moral protection for the nation.

We also have a need to stay sober and vigilant in our walk with the Lord Jesus Christ – on constant watch for the enemies attacks. In 1 Thessalonians 5:5-8 the Apostle Paul states, **"You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be**

sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.”

Now comes the second priority...

B. There was a spiritual need of worship.

Nehemiah appointed singers to lead in worship. You see, he understood that there is more to life than a job and a secure home. It was on the heart of Nehemiah that Jerusalem have God as its priority. He understood that worship keeps us focused on our priorities. It keeps our focus on God.

Nehemiah appointed singers, because without worship, the city would soon be reduced to the values of the godless, and they would once again become a city without walls.

Now the third priority...

C. There was a moral need of teaching.

Here we find that Nehemiah appointed Levites. What did they do? Well we know that the Levites served in the services in the temple. They assisted the priests. But even more than that in Nehemiah's plan they also served as Israel's teachers. In chapter 8 we are going to see that when Ezra reads the scriptures, **“the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law;”** (8:7) and **“they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading”** (8:8).

It was their responsibility teach the Israelites and convey the great realities of the faith.

And fourth,

D. There was a practical need for leadership.

This particular act is one that is both courageous and gracious. Many a time, a leader has to give up a role that they enjoy doing themselves in the recognition that it is now someone else's turn to do so. It is now, “your turn” and the torch is passed. Nehemiah shows us the importance of discipleship when he turns leadership roles over to others.

You might remember the problem that Nehemiah faces at the end of chapter 6. He has been put in a very difficult position of trying to distinguish between friend and foe. So, as he looks for those that can lead, they must be people that can be trusted.

First, they must be reliable, faithful and loyal: **“a faithful man.”** It must be true that they are not capable of being manipulated by the enemies or the desire of monetary gain.

Second, God must be their priority, **“feared God more than many.”** When God is first, then the other priorities will be right as well.

Review the present reality. Also, recognize the future need. Every successful assignment should cause us to recognize the future need. Nehemiah did that in verse 4:

II. Recognize the Future Need (7:4-5).

4 Now the city was large and spacious, but the people in it were few, and the houses were not rebuilt.

5 Then my God put it into my heart to gather the nobles, the rulers, and the people, that they might be registered by genealogy. And I found a register of the genealogy of those who had come up in the first return, and found written in it:

All throughout this study in Nehemiah, we've talked about the different burdens that God gives His people. He gives each of us a burden and He expects us to lead in accomplishing that burden. He gave Nehemiah a burden for Jerusalem. At first, that burden looked like a wall. But that was just a part of the burden. Because once the wall was complete, Nehemiah looked around and saw that something still wasn't right. The remnant had a wall. They had a temple. They even had a city. But there weren't many people there. The remnant was still very small. And not only was the remnant small, the buildings of the city were still in ruins. There was still a need.

The need was **"large and great."** That's why God's burden doesn't stop with completing a successful assignment. Once the assignment is complete, the burden doesn't go away. It doesn't go away, because the mission isn't complete. Just because the wall was finished didn't mean that the remnant was where they were supposed to be. Much more needed to be accomplished for them to be the kind of witness to the nations that God wanted them to be. Because God had given him the burden, Nehemiah could see that. He could see that the remnant needed to multiply. He could see that houses needed to be built and occupied. He could see that city infrastructure and buildings needed to be built. Even though they had just accomplished a miraculous assignment, he knew that they had a long way to go.

He saw that the need was large and great. But that didn't cause him to discount the amazing nature of what had been accomplished. Otherwise he wouldn't have appointed the singers and Levites to celebrate and give praise. What it caused him to do was to plan for the future. There is still more to do and one of those things is painting a picture of what is yet to happen. Jerusalem will be a full and thriving community.

So, as leaders, we must recognize the future need. But that's not all. We can't just be people who are focused on the present reality. At the same time, we can't just be people who have our heads way out in the future somewhere. No—because we must also be people who remember the past heritage. Every successful assignment should cause us to remember the past heritage.

III. Remember the Past Heritage (7:6-73).

6 These are the people of the province who came back from the captivity, of those who had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, everyone to his city.

Verses 6-73 in this chapter are basically a list of names. When you get to passages like this in the Bible, it's easy to skip over them— but in Nehemiah's day it was of utmost importance to be able to prove you were truly of Jewish descent. This is basically the same genealogy found in Ezra 2. The point is...these folks mattered to God!

It was the passion of Nehemiah to have people in Jerusalem who knew where they came from and the great heritage they had in the Lord. It was important for them to know their identity and their heritage. Pagan nations had influenced Israel's history before and Nehemiah wanted to keep covenant with the Lord through the worship of Jehovah God alone! There could be no compromise with other nations and their gods – living in the city required commitment to the worship of the One True and Living God.

Having a knowledge of your identity in Christ Jesus, being sure of your salvation, is essential for being a productive member of God's church. Do you know how important you are to God?

Your significance in life does not come primarily through your job, bank account, or retirement plan...but through your relationship with the Lord. Just showing up with the returning Jewish families did not necessarily include you in the family – there were many priests and families not included at all.

Just having your name on a church roll does not guarantee that you are a child of God. It's not enough just to have your name written down on the church roll – but your name must be written in the Lamb's book of life!

Are you sure of that?

So, where are we in accomplishing our mission? We're a long way from it. There is a whole world of people who need to hear the Gospel. We have successfully completed some assignments along the way. But that success is not a reason to stop and admire our work. It's a reason to keep pressing forward. No matter what your age or experience or personality... God has a burden for each of us. He expects us to step out and lead in that burden. And He expects us to keep on pressing forward until our mission is finally accomplished.