

**PP Nehemiah: 4D Praying****Nehemiah 9:38****4/27-28, 2013**

Illus We all remember the illustration of the young boy who is being disciplined by his Mom – He was in church with his mother and he would not sit still. He kept standing up in the pew. His mom kept saying sit down. He would sit down for a few minutes and get back up again. She said again, “I said sit down.” This happened several times. The little boy stood up and would not sit down. His mother, aggravated, put her hand on the top of his head and pushed him down. The little boy sat fuming. He looked at his mom and said, “I may be sitting down on the outside, but I’m standing up on the inside .”

We are naturally rebellious and while we may do what we’re told, sometimes inside we bristle But the working of the Holy Spirit is to change us from the inside out, putting His desires and His power in us so that we both want and have the means to do God’s will

We are looking today at the final direction of prayer, and it is going to move us into an in depth look at the fruit of repentance that creates in us, a rededication to love God and love each other,

So let me ask this question to you who are married

If you could rewind your life, knowing all you do now, would you marry that person you did?

I have had the privilege of officiating a few marriage rededication ceremonies, but never like the one like I did recently...for this one was a remarriage ceremony

This couple had divorced each other, each remaining single, and after a few years, decided to remarry each other

Have you ever given up on something?

I have some good friends who gave on the Eagles last year, 3 games in: they’re pretty smart!

Maybe you’ve given up on a job, or a church, or a relationship, yourself, or God!

Have you ever given up on a city?

Jerusalem had lain in ruins for 141 years, and it seemed hopeless, with powerful enemies surrounding them, that it would ever be rebuilt

They had given up and chapter one tells us, ***“The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire.”*** Nehemiah 1:3

But God is a rebuilding God, and He rebuilds lives, marriages, families, hope, and even cities He is rebuilding the city and restoring His people!!

He led His people to rebuild their city’s wall, making them safe from their enemies

But not just a wall to hide behind, a wall whose name is ***‘Salvation’***, that marked them as God’s people, who live for His glory and He dwells among them with His favor!

Then they repaired the gates

Walls keep the wrong people out, while gates let the right people in

You came in or left a city through the gates

Gates create healthy community and they create the way to go out to do God’s work

Nehemiah gave us a tour around the wall to see these gates in chapter 3

**PP** (Map of the Gates' He started at the **Sheep Gate**, the Gate that leads to the cross of Calvary where Jesus died for our sins, offering salvation and life  
 Then the **Fish Gate**, where we immediately begin testify to what He has done for us, being fishers of men and women  
 Then the **Old Gate**, the Gate of Yashenah, where we begin to ground our lives on the ancient wisdom of the Word of God  
 Then the wall took that long descent downhill to the **Valley Gate**, where we learn to trust God and our faith is exercised through trials, forcing impurities to the surface  
 Thankfully the **Dung Gate** awaits us as it is the gate of confession, where we take those impurities to our merciful God Who cleanses us from all unrighteousness  
 And God immediately takes us to the **Fountain Gate**, the gate of the Holy Spirit, where He fills the now clean heart with His joy and strength  
 And what He fills us with is found at the next gate, the **Water Gate**, which is the Word of God  
 And we will need that powerful Word in us because the next gate is the **Horse Gate** of spiritual warfare, where we battle the enemies of God: Satan, the world and our flesh  
 But we have hope, because the next gate is the **East Gate**, the gate through which our Lord and Savior will return for us, and this gives us hope to battle in his strength  
 And when He returns, and finally judges all the nations, we will all appear before the final gate, the **Muster Gate**, and His people will receive commendation and eternal life, while those who rejected Jesus will receive condemnation and eternal punishment  
 The entire story of the gospel is shown in the gates of chapter 3

But the enemies around them, symbolizing the devil, the world and our flesh, opposed them  
 Yet still, the wall was completed and the gates repaired, and we again remember our victorious Savior is the author and perfecter of our faith  
 The wall and gates were rebuilt, but inside the city was desolate, so Nehemiah need to restore it

**PP** There we recalled the ancient promise of God to Israel and the church: ***"I will let the house of Israel ask me to do for them: to increase their people like a flock. Like the flock for sacrifices, like the flock at Jerusalem during her appointed feasts, so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of people. Then they will know that I am the Lord."***  
**Ezekiel 36:37-38**

God has told us to pray this: Ask Him to increase our congregations; with people ready to serve Him; to fill the cities; and make His name famous!

The reason we are studying this book and taking our time through it, is that we are in the midst  
**PP** of working together to 'Rebuild a spiritual wall around the east-end of the Lehigh Valley'

And we have begun by starting an additional worship center right down in the city of Easton  
 It looks like an uphill battle, Easton is mired in darkness; drugs and prostitution, crime and fatherless families all above national averages

What changes a community?

It is the gospel of Jesus Christ that is the power of God unto salvation!

It is the preaching **and** demonstration of the gospel, the exaltation of Jesus Christ that transforms communities

So we bought a church building, and we have started worship services down in Easton  
To exalt Jesus and preach Jesus and to love like Jesus, into the demographic cluster of the city

But buying buildings is not the norm for a multi-siting church  
Normally, you begin a worship site in a home, fire hall, theater, or rent an available space  
But can you imagine having sister campuses, worship centers, planted from PenArgyl to  
Riegelsville, Freemansburg to Stewartsville?

This is our vision, what we are trusting God for  
We aren't aiming to be a megaplex church, and those churches who do, nothing wrong with it  
We aren't hoping the world comes to us, we are planting in the midst of where the people are,  
taking the good news of what God has done through Jesus to them  
And we aren't about creating 1,000 church programs, though some are good and necessary  
We are about gathering often, helping each other grow, encouraging each other, and getting back  
onto the mission fields of work, school, neighborhoods, dorm rooms, teams, etc

If you are checking out our church, cool, we hope you are challenged and encouraged by the  
worship, preaching and teaching and fellowship

But if you call Cornerstone your church, then we are asking you to get on the wall and serve,  
to partner with God and rebuild and make this church strong!

Christianity isn't a spectator sport!

Help repair and guard and watch over our gates, encouraging others to come to worship Jesus  
Christ, but also encouraging each other to go back out with the good news that Jesus can  
rebuild anyone's life, and help them walk on streets of peace

In Nehemiah 8, we saw the people gather together, and they read the word of God for hours, and  
they began to be made sorrowful for the ways they had been living their lives

They had loved their comfort and glory more than God's glory and worship!

Many had become friends with their enemies, partners, and now *'in great trouble and shame'*

So they gathered again as one people and their spiritual leaders led them in prayer

**PP** I find it significant that this coming **Thursday, May 2<sup>nd</sup>**, is the National Day of Prayer  
An opportunity for Christians to pray for revival from all over the United States

**PP** The Levites led them to **Look up** in prayer, and exalt their awesome, glorious God  
Exalting God works like a teeter totter, a see saw, and as we lift up our God, our own self-  
obsession is reduced in humility

**PP** And then they shifted to **Looking back**, forced to re-examine their peoples' times of  
unfaithfulness

But the Levites showed them more than this, they revealed God's fingerprints of mercy

**PP** And then the Levites led their people to **Look In** with confidence in their ever-working God;  
through the lens of the gospel, taking responsibility for their sins, yet taking their minds  
captive in truth

They were the people of God, rebuilding the city of God!

He has forgiven them and given them a hope for a new future!

**PP** And it is that future hope that gives aim to the 4<sup>th</sup> and final direction of prayer, **Look Ahead**

The people of God in Nehemiah don't want to walk back in that prison!  
 They want to live free, and stay free from the enslaving power of sin  
 They want to live ongoing lives of repentance, a new beginning different than their past  
***"Because of all this we make a firm covenant in writing; on the sealed document are the names of our princes, our Levites, and our priests."*** 9:38

***'Because of all this...'*** because of God's faithfulness even when theirs was lacking  
***'we make'***, or rather we cut a ***'firm covenant'***  
 The word 'covenant' is not actually in the original manuscripts, it is assumed by the words  
***'make'*** and ***'sealed document'***

It was customary in the ancient world that when a person made a covenant, an agreement, to make it binding, he would kill an animal and cut it in two pieces, and then utter their oath while walking between them  
 In effect saying, that what was done to that animal should be done to him if he fail to uphold his promise  
 Do you remember the old schoolyard oath, *"Cross my heart, hope to die, (stick a needle in my eye)"*  
 We use an idiom that I believe developed from this: *"The star running back was in no hurry to cut a deal."*  
 Because of their unfaithfulness, and in view of God's utter faithfulness in dealing with them, they made, or cut a covenant, a promise, an agreement!

They made it together, as the pronoun ***'we'*** shows  
 A covenant is a special contract to bind a special relationship  
 When you take out a loan, you are entering into a covenant with the bank  
 When you marry, you are making a covenant with your spouse  
 In a covenant, there are obligations and benefits and blessings, and conditions

We practice covenant membership here at Cornerstone  
 We have 8 classes that you participate in, where we explain what we believe and what we do and why  
 We answer your questions, you get to know us and we get to know you  
 It's kind of like the pre-marriage counseling that we offer before we officiate a wedding  
 Then if you choose to become a member of our church because you are in agreement, we sign a covenant with you as we agree together how we will conduct ourselves and serve together in our church to the glory of God

This is what we have in verse 38, a membership covenant of a people who are dedicating themselves to live as the people of God and serve Him and each other!  
 They put it in writing, so it can stand as a memorial of the seriousness of their promise!  
 It's a sealed document, meaning that it is official and notarized and legally binding!  
 And it's signed by 84 men: ***'our princes, our Levites, and our priests.'***  
 These are the leaders of the people, and they function similarly to our leaders of the church,  
***'Our Elders, our Deacons, and our Pastors'***  
 All serving together, all representing the people, all signing their names on the seal

It was personal, it was a promise that was binding and it was public  
It was a Declaration of Dependence!

We tend to make personal promises to God that are broken fairly quickly and we feel terrible for a while

This wasn't an exercise in spiritual emotion, this was a rational, thought-through rededication of their lives to their God, similar to what Paul moved the church to do in romans 12:1

**PP** ***"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship"***

**Romans 12:1**

But writing it down, and making it personal and public, makes the agreement concrete and raises the accountability

This is a fresh start in God's mercy, and a going forward with biblical support!

### **PP Cornerstone Church Dedication Statement**

*To all in the City of Easton, its leaders, the surrounding community, and to the principalities and powers: On this day in April, 2013, the elders and deacons, pastors and staff, members and congregants of Cornerstone Church praise our Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father for the work He has done and will continue to do at this facility. The Lord is faithful and He alone is worthy of our praise.*

*As we stand in this place, we hereby dedicate this building to the Kingdom of God; to He who is the beginning and the end, for whom all things are created; to He who created the heavens and the earth, the seas and all that is in them. We dedicate this building to be used as a gathering place for teaching, training, thanksgiving, and worship of the one true God. We dedicate this building to be a place of prayer for the spiritual welfare of the people of the city – that all who enter and exit through its doors would know the steadfast love of the Lord. And we dedicate ourselves to following after the Lord with our whole heart and mind; to be God's vessels to carry His love and truth into the community.*

*We will take from here, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the message of forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and awesome joy through faith in the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ alone – His perfect life, death, and resurrection that overcame sin and death for the sake of the world.*

*May all who enter here experience the righteousness, mercy, deliverance, compassion, grace and peace of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. May the name of Jesus Christ be ever magnified by those who worship here, and may God alone receive all the glory for the work He accomplishes within these walls.*

*In the name and under the authority of Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen.*

Are you standing with us as we build a spiritual wall around the east end of the Lehigh Valley?

As we bear the gospel-in Word and in Deed-to our community!

Exalting the life, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our hope for the nations!

When we return to Nehemiah in two weeks, we will take a close look at their covenant, and I believe we may discover how relevant it is to our own day!

Pray