

PP Nehemiah: The Work Begins!

Text **Nehemiah 3:1**

Part 8-6/16-17

Illus I read recently about Stefan Sigmund from Romania who tried desperately to get himself into the Guinness Book of Records. He rigged up a contraption that looked like a car air filter and managed to smoke 800 cigarettes in under 6 minutes. Unfortunately, he discovered that Guinness no longer accepted those kind of accomplishments. So then he ate 29 hardboiled eggs in four minutes, but Guinness quit printing gluttony records many years ago. So he jumped into a lake from a 135 foot cliff, only to find out that the record had already been set at 176 feet

Some people really like to be recognized for their accomplishments
There will be a day when all of God's people are gathered before His throne in a great multitude
and books will be opened and the stories of the faithful are read
Accounts of how people served God and spent their lives for His glory will be told
God will honor His faithful ones, and many will hear, "Well done good and faithful servant"

Nehemiah 3 is a foretaste of the recognition that comes for God's faithful servants

As we turn there, know that Nehemiah is about to give us a tour around the wall, and we'll stop
along the way to pay particular attention to gates
But before we go on this tour, we need to get some pre-trip information
Jerusalem, the city, is a type of the church of God
And around the city, the church, there must be a wall that separates and makes us distinct from
the world

PP It was the Scottish poet Horatius Bonar who said: *'I looked for the church and I found it in
the world, I looked for the world and I found it in the church'*

Walls are dividing lines that say to our enemies keep out, you may not come in
If there is no wall, then a church, or a Christian cannot feel secure in their salvation

While walls keep the enemies out, gates allow the right people in to enjoy His presence together
Walls make us secure in our salvation, gates make us accessible to our God
The name God gave to the wall of Jerusalem was **'salvation'**, the name of its gates, **'praise'**
They were more than entry points into God's presence, they were gathering points for fellowship
The elders of a city would gather at the gates to hold court, those in need would gather there to
beg for help, day laborers were at the gates early in the morning hoping to get hired

PP ***"Do not rob the poor, because he is poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate,"*** **Prov 22:22**

Public announcements were often made by the gate, markets were installed next to some of them
The prophets of God would preach at the gates
Gates were the entrance into the life of the people on many levels
But gates were vulnerable sections of the defense and typically where enemies attacked
If the gates can be destroyed, the enemies could pour in, a standard battle tactic

PP If you capture the gates, you capture the city: ***"And your offspring shall possess the gate of
his enemies,"*** **Genesis 22:17**

PP Because of this they were often fortified by towers: ***"Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at the
Corner Gate and at the Valley Gate and at the Angle, and fortified them."*** **2 Ch 26:9**

Isaiah tells us that leaders of God's people are watchmen that stand on these towers to fortify gates against the enemies of God: **PP** *"On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have set watchmen; all the day and all the night they shall never be silent. You who put the LORD in remembrance, take no rest, and give him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it a praise in the earth."* Isaiah 62:6-7

Remember, Jerusalem is a type of the church of God
God has given His church watchmen who preach, pray and give God no rest until He establishes His people

Wall-builders are to rebuild the gates that the people of God may enter into the presence of God with praise and walk the streets of fellowship in peace

When there are broken walls and burned gates in our lives we can neither praise God or experience peace with Him or the people of God

So today, we will pay particular attention to the 10 gates, and see that Nehemiah's presentation of them invite all of us into the security and glory of the presence of our God

PP And as we do, remember the words of **Psalm 87**, *"On the holy mount stands the city He founded; the Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob. Glorious things of you are spoken, O city of God."* 1-3

The Lord loves the Gates of His people, and with that we begin where Nehemiah did,

PP 1-(Map) 'the Sheep Gate'

"Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests, and they built the Sheep Gate. They consecrated it and set its doors." 3:1

If we are to rebuild our walls and repair our gates, it must start here at the *Sheep Gate*

Nehemiah could have begun anywhere on the wall but he deliberately chose this gate located on the Northeast part of the wall

For military reasons, it was necessary to repair this gate because Jerusalem had consistently been attacked on her northern side which opened up to the central Benjamin plateau

The rest of the perimeter of the city had natural valley topography as her defense

Recall also that their greatest enemy in the time of Nehemiah was Sanballat, from the North

It stands to reason that Nehemiah would begin construction there, for immediate fortification and defense

Yet, there is a much deeper and more significant reason and we need to see it today

I like how Nehemiah wrote this: *"Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests"*

They were the first to get to work!

It seems that they had no hesitation, but could not wait to begin to build!

The leaders of God's people must always set the example and lead the way

And what they built was the *'Sheep Gate'*, the gate that led to the Temple, the House of God

Nehemiah begins and ends with this Gate, for it points to Jesus, the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end

It was so named because it was through it that sacrificial lambs were brought into the city

Even today, a sheep market is installed periodically near this area

In **John 5:2**, it was located near the Bethesda Pool, and likely was the body of water the sheep

were washed in before sacrifice

PP ***"I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved."*** **John 10:9**

If one is to come into the presence of God, it must be through the gate of sacrifice, at the cross of Jesus Christ

It is the gate through which a person is saved and can enter into the presence of God

It is the gate that signifies that the Lamb of God will shed His blood for us

It is the starting place, for there is no wall of salvation without the forgiveness of God through the death of His Son on that wretched cross

It is the starting place of rebuilding, for it is the starting point of the gospel

PP It is the place where **Psalm 85** says ***"Steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other."*** **10**

If your wall is down Christians, start again at the Sheep Gate, not to be saved again, for Christ died was ***"offered once to bear the sins of many"*** **Hebrews 9:28**

We start again at this gate because we easily forget in our pride that nothing in the kingdom can be built by our own power alone

Our salvation began as a work of Christ, our endurance is by that same power

If we are to rebuild our walls, do not go to the world for resources and power, for it wants your walls down

Go back to where you started, at the cross, the power of the gospel!

Meet the Lord at this gate, the place of beggars, and ask for Him to carry the paralyzed feet of your broken life, or those of your friend, back to the cross, to the power of the gospel

This is a gate that was to be built by the priests, those who administered the sacrifices

Priests were bridge-builders who connecting God with His people

Now look carefully at what the Word of God says to all the brothers and sisters of Christ: ***"But***

PP ***you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."*** **1 Peter 2:9**

Each believer is a priest, so build that bridge between that broken-walled brother or sister and the Sheep Gate of Jesus Christ

Draw them through that gate back into the hope and presence of God, where rebuilding starts!

Notice ***"They consecrated it and set its doors"*** (**Nehemiah 3:1**).

This was to be permanently set apart for holy purposes, dedicated to God

Friends, the Sheep Gate is still the gate where it all begins

If you are not saved, and you have no wall of salvation around you, then this is the gate you enter in to be saved

If you are saved, and your walls are in rubble, this is again your starting place to rebuild

This gate has no locks or bars, for the way is always open for God's people to come to Him

PP ***"we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that He opened for us through the curtain...let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith"*** **Hebrews 10:19-22**

The way is open in Christ, never locked against His brothers and sisters

Out from the ***Sheep Gate***, the wall begins reconstruction, and we need to see a very important

phrase in verse 2: ***“And next to him”***, occurring 15 times
The work was seamless, continuous and shared
There were no gaps in this wall, no openings for the enemy to get through
They worked shoulder to shoulder, one person, one family, picking up from the work of the other
Your portion of the wall may be in nursery, or women’s ministry, or in Africa, or your school...

And there will come some into our church who are very different than you, who struggle with sin
in ways you do not and who may not be as far along with Christ as you
Some whose personalities make it difficult to get along with
Some with different skin colors and ethnic backgrounds and economic situations
Some who are struggling with addictions to drugs or alcohol
Some who have made terrible mistakes in their past and you know about them
The question is: Who could you *not* work shoulder to shoulder with?

Another phrase all through this chapter is ***‘after him’*** or ***‘after them’***, 16 times
Sometimes shoulder to shoulder means one after another
It will likely not be your job to rebuild someone’s entire wall, you simply have a section
I have begun to learn to know when my portion of the wall is finished, when it is time for a
person to have the next wall-builder in his or her life
The same is true for churches, in pastoral leadership
I want to give honor to Dean Carlson who built his portion of the wall here before me
Dean centered this church so solidly on the Word of God and the Cornerstone of Jesus Christ
It’s my turn to lead the rebuilding and I build a little differently, but with the same essential
materials
Someday my turn will be over and the next builder must do the same!
And all the while, the watchtowers are built up, so that godly, Christ-loving, Bible –centered
leaders may watch over the church

PP We must build all build together, ***“speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”*** Ephesians 4:15-16

PP 2-(Map) ‘the Fish Gate

As our tour continues, we come to the gate through which fishermen brought their catch

“The sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate. They laid its beams and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars.” 3:3

PP Immediately most of us are drawn to the words of Jesus to His followers: ***“Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.”*** Mark 1:17

This is the gate of witness
It is the first gate you come to after the gate of the cross for a reason
It is to be the most immediate thing we do as Christians, give witness to Jesus Christ
If walls are to be rebuilt in our lives we must practice what we preached last week
Speak to the truth to each other
Speak the truth about the power and goodness of our God

Speak the truth to the enemies of God

If you do not testify of Christ, and witness of His work in your life, this gate is down and your enemies are pouring in

God, I'll tell her about you the next time I see her

And all the while Sanballat is saying you have no witness that anybody cares to hear

Your flesh tells you that you will mess it up anyways and the world convinces you that you will be despised and rejected

We repair this gate by getting on mission, and being a witness for Jesus Christ!

And you don't need to be a biblical scholar, or someone who debates well

Tomorrow morning you are driving and you see a terrible vehicle accident take place

You immediately stop to help and you're there when the police come

They ask you what happened because you are an eye-witness, so you share what you saw and what happened

You're not an accident reconstruction expert, analyzing the skid marks, determining operator or operational factors, roadway factors or laws of physics

You won't be able to stand there and say to the police, I'm not qualified to be a witness

You were there, you were involved in a way, your testimony has value and can stand up in court

Christian brothers, do you need to repair the Fish Gate and be a witness for Jesus Christ?

Do you need to lay ***'its beams and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars.'*** 3:3

Fix it in place, make it part of your life, and the enemies will have one less way to enter and disrupt your life and sow seeds of doubt and lies

When the Fish Gate is secure, when we boldly proclaim the reason for our hope to those who do not believe, our salvation is made secure and the glory of God in our hearts will be a city set on a hill whose light cannot be hidden

PP Today, we looked at the first two gates on Nehemiah's construction plan: the ***Sheep Gate*** and the ***Fish Gate***

The first brings us back to our hope in Jesus, and the power of the gospel to rebuild

The second is the proclamation of that gospel and the witness of God's people to the world!

And we saw that we stand shoulder to shoulder, some building the next section, and some build after others

But all building on the foundation of Jesus Christ

The tour has just begun, and we have a lot more to learn!

Pray