

PP **Nehemiah: Building the Church, Filling the City**

Text Nehemiah 7:4-73

Part 24, 1/19-20, 2013

Illus “Wherever you are, be all there. Live to the hilt every situation you believe to be the will of God” Jim Elliot, as quoted by his wife Elisabeth in Through Gates of Splendor

As we look at chapter 7, we see a list of nearly unpronounceable names and irrelevant numbers. Why are they in the bible, and what do we do with them?

PP “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Chapter 7 is profitable, and can make us complete and equipped to live rightly!

I want to share 5 principles that show us *How to build the church and fill the city!*

“The city was wide and large, but the people within it were few, and no houses had been rebuilt.” Nehemiah 7:4

PP *God wants to fill His church with people who will build His kingdom

Jerusalem, where God dwelled with His people, and represents the glory of the church for us

It is made up of all who come to God through Jesus Christ, Jew and Gentile

But the city of Jerusalem, though it was ‘*wide and large*’, was sitting empty

You ever gone to a church and in that big sanctuary, there are only a few worshipers?

It is sad, depressing and discouraging, and it was the same with Jerusalem

Some estimate that Jerusalem at the time of Nehemiah was around 200 acres big

It’s walls were rebuilt, the temple functioning, but it was a ghost town with broken down homes

Friends, God wants the city of our church to have a strong wall and healthy homes and families

PP Where the church is there ought to be abundant life and joy and healing: “*And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in.*”

Isaiah 58:12

God wants His city, He wants His church, filled with His people celebrating and rejoicing and serving Him together

PP In fact He tells us to pray for this: “*Thus says the Lord GOD: This also 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

We are praying in God’s will when we ask Him to increase the church with people ready to serve Him and make His name famous

Nehemiah sees 200 acres of broken homes, and few people

We look at Easton and Nazareth and Phillipsburg, and see broken homes and few believers

Rampant drug trafficking, violence, addictions, single-parent homes, prostitution

Friends, the church alone holds the answer and it is the transforming power of Jesus Christ

How are we to build the church and fill the city?

PP **God wants us to learn to walk by faith*

“Then my God put it into my heart...” 7:5

Notice that no angel visited Nehemiah with a Church growth scroll

He didn't attend a conference for training and he didn't hire church growth consultants

None of these are necessarily wrong, and while they can be helpful, they're not the primary biblical model

God reveals His will as we spend time in His Word and in prayer

Friends, are you approaching an intersection in life and you're going to need to make a decision?

What major; what career; college or job; should I marry; what medical treatment plan to take?

How does God guide us?

We want God to download a file into our mind called, 'My will', and double click it in prayer

But God tends to reveal His will by continuous streaming rather than handing us a thumb drive with all the answers

And the medium He uses is relationship

Notice a hint at this when Nehemiah wrote, ***“Then my God put it into my heart”***

Connection established, ***‘My God’***

I listen closely for people to shift from saying of Cornerstone 'your church' to 'our church'

Our is on the other side of relationship from *your*

If Jesus Christ is someone else's Savior, then you have no connection with God

But when you can say Jesus is my Savior, God is streaming His will into your heart, giving you His desires and thoughts, and we pick them up in His Word and prayer

And notice *when* God gave these instructions to Nehemiah

It wasn't months before when Nehemiah was living in Susa, crying out for Jerusalem

And it wasn't day 23 of building the wall, when he had to notice the rubble of the homes, and the lack of people living in Jerusalem

Nehemiah knew that God would show him what to do when it is was time

When God streams His will He is teaching us to learn to walk by faith and not by sight, the same thing that Elijah, Moses, Peter, Paul and every biblical saint had to learn

PP **God wants us to trust that He gives us all we need to do all He asks*

He put into Nehemiah's heart to ***“assemble the nobles and the officials and the people to be enrolled by genealogy.”***

I don't know about you, but this has the feel of a bad punch line where the music suddenly screeches to a halt

God, you want me to fill the city by opening up the membership rolls?

Are you serious?

PP God commands us, ***“all things should be done decently and in order.” 1 Corinthians 14:40***

We have membership classes, we track attendance, we budget wisely

PP We use an 8 question Priority filter to discipline us to start new ministries carefully

Building the church and filling the city is to be done thoughtfully but there is a further reason

God wanted Nehemiah to pull out the membership records

You will understand more clearly what God wants our church to do when you see who He is
bringing into your church
God supplies all we need to do all He will ask us to do!

In verse 7, Nehemiah lists 12 names who some believe represents the 12 tribes of Israel
Okay, we've got all the tribes present (*some of you are counting them to make sure I'm right*)
So he moves on to all the '**sons of...**' as he counts the heads of the families
Then in verse 39, he takes note of how priests there are, and drills down a level in 43 to see how
many Levites, singers and gatekeepers he had to work with
In 46, he calculates all the temple servants who were the assistants to the priests
Nehemiah is counting the cost before he builds!
In verse 61, he recorded those who claimed to belong to Israel but had no proof, like those in the
church who say their Christians but cannot give clear testimony or evidence of salvation
They counted themselves as Jews but they could not prove '**they belonged to Israel**'
So Nehemiah tells them to wait until a priest comes and can help them discern whether they are
part of God's people or not
Today it is us saying let's wait a little while, let's give God time to make it clear to all of us if
you are in Christ or not
In the meantime, don't take communion, don't eat the holy food, it's for God's people only

The whole group was over 42,000, if you add in the others listed, over 50,000
That's bigger than Joel Osteen's church
That's nearly twice the population of the city of Easton
But I can see 50,000 Christians flooding into the Christ-exalting churches in the east-end of the
Lehigh Valley
God wants to fill the cities!
God wants to increase our people like a flock of sheep who are ready to serve Him
This isn't about building a mega-church, it's about the kingdom of God exploding light into
darkness and giving people hope and life and purpose
This is vision, it takes faith, and Nehemiah shows us it can happen!

In verse 70, we get a record of all the money that was given to the work of God
And you wondered if membership records and budget reports were biblical!
They are testaments that God gives us all we need-people and money-to do all He asks
We pay close attention to you, our congregation, knowing that none of us are here by accident
If you call this church yours then we want to help you find your place here to serve and be served
PP This is why we are launching on our website, and you can go right to the foyer and use the Ipad, and fill out what we call the CORE 80
With our multi-site launch at 2nd Street a couple of months away, we are asking each
Cornerstone worshiper to help us know where you would like to serve
This is an exciting time, and you can fill this out and you'll get a call from a Campus Pastor and
we'll start to see how to get you involved
So either get to that Ipad today, or go our site from your phone or computer and we'll begin
contacting you and getting you on the wall to serve

Do you find it interesting that every name listed in chapter 7 is a man's?

Liberals would cry that Judaism was misogynistic, God chauvinistic, the bible male-dominated
To keep accurate genealogy records in the Old Testament, you listed people through the man's
line of descent and it went so and so, son of so and so
But men, listen to what I am telling you, because we have an epidemic problem with this
God has created and entrusted you to serve by leading graciously, courageously and well!
The absence of female names doesn't mean women are incapable of great things or unimportant
Over and over, God has raised up women to do remarkable things in His kingdom, and church
history speaks to this constantly
Yet throughout God's Holy Word men are entrusted with gracious, compassionate leadership
PP *"I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her
husband, and the head of Christ is God."* 1 Corinthians 11:3

Men, to build the church and fill the city, we must learn that...

PP **God wants men to lead beyond their generation!*

"the sons of Parosh, 2,172. The sons of Shephatiah, 372. The sons of Arah, 652." 7:8-10

These are sons of men who left the comfort and security of Babylon and risked it all to come
back to a war-torn, decimated Jerusalem to live in the land their God had promised
That takes great faith on the disciples who gave up their careers to follow God
And that kind of faith finds its way into generations of children!
Are you thinking 5, 10, 20 generations after your life?

If not, you are thinking too short-sighted...so pray, ask God to give you 15 generations of godly
children

Invest truth into your family and salt it with grace, so that it'll produce godly generations
You can change your family legacy by your faithfulness
You might have in your past a damaged family line, but grace can change it for the future!
The same is true for you ladies, for we all know how incredibly influential you are!
But men, listen, God wants to start with you to redeem your family line and sow His grace for
generations to come

Imagine one day being in heaven and meet the 3,000 people who descend from you
Each one coming up to you and giving their name, and they have your last name
Saying thank you for walking with Jesus, and how your life impacted their faith
Telling you that you it was in your life, that God broke the direction of sin in your parents, and
wove grace into the lives of hundreds and thousands

Let me share one final principle this morning, and we see it at the end of the chapter:

PP **God wants us to rebuild right where we are!*

*"So the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, some of the people, the temple
servants, and all Israel, lived in their towns."* Nehemiah 7:73

Notice how this ends...all the temple staff *'lived in their towns.'*
The plan was not to rebuild the spiritual life of Jerusalem while the towns remained carnal
You serve God right where you live, work, go to school, compete, and enjoy hobbies
You work out at the gym regularly...then how are you meeting people for Christ?

Wherever we are that is where we are to build the church and fill the city

The priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers all served in rotating shifts at the temple
Most of them lived outside the city, where they would serve in the same ways
We serve in the church, but that doesn't complete our service
We use our gifts and skills and passions right where we live, in our towns!

We have school teachers finding ways for our church to serve in their schools
We have a lady here who leads a choir in a nursing home, another one who volunteered in a
hospital to visit and encourage the sick, leading dozens to Christ
Others who are opening bible studies for their unsaved neighbors and coworkers
For Christmas, one of our men received a thank you plaque from his bible study group for all he
has done for them...and this is at a local technology company
This is how you build the church and fill the city!

This assembly took place in the 6th month of their calendar, and when the seventh month arrived,
all these people came back and they committed to serve their God and church got rolling!
We'll see it happen as we look at chapter 8 next week!

PP **God wants to fill His church with people who will build His kingdom*

**God wants us to learn to walk by faith*

**God wants us to trust that He gives us all we need to do all He asks*

**God wants men to lead beyond their generation*

**God wants us to rebuild right where we are!*

Pray