

# Let Us Rise and Build

## Free to Build

Nehemiah

Good morning! Thank you so much for being here this morning. If you have your bibles, go ahead and be opening to the book of Nehemiah. We are in the second half of our Ezra/Nehemiah sermon series, Free to Build. From the book of Ezra, we understand that as the New Testament covenant people of God, based on how God moved on the life of His Old Testament covenant people, we have the privilege of building God's house, His church today. As we enter into the book of Nehemiah, we saw last week that we're not only free to build God's house, but we are free to build the walls, literally, of our society.

Last week, many of you realized in the early service that we did not get as far as we meant to get. As I look back on it this week, I realize we probably walked through the first four verses, literally. At that pace, there's no way we can cover the book of Nehemiah in the time that we're planning on covering it. So this morning, if you don't mind we are going to try to get back on track and pick up the pace. Our goal this morning (don't let this shock you) is to try to be at the end of chapter 3. We're going to start in verse 5 of chapter 1. In order to do that, we can't walk through these verses. We're going to have to drive through these verses at the maximum speed limit that the mind can listen and the voice can speak. So we're going to have to buckle our spiritual seatbelts in just a few moments. Now, I know some of you like to walk through Scripture. I like to walk through Scripture too, so I don't want anybody to believe as we travel at a faster rate this morning that we're going to miss out on any truths. We're really not. We're going to get on what we call the interstate and travel through chapters 1, 2, and 3 this morning. I know sometimes when you travel by interstate you bypass towns like Hardin, like Benton, or Clarksville, but if

we were going to Florida on the interstate, we would drive right through Nashville Tennessee. We would drive right through Atlanta Georgia. So we're not going to bypass anything important this morning in these first three chapters; we're just going to drive through at a little faster pace than we normally do. But I promise you we will not miss out on any truths that we need to know in rebuilding the broken down walls of morality and ethics that our society so desperately needs. Stand with me and read from Nehemiah 2:17-20, and then we will back up and look at three sections of Scripture at a little faster pace than what we normally do.

## **Scripture**

***"Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision." And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me. And they said, "Let us rise up and build." So they strengthened their hands for the good work. But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they jeered at us and despised us and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?" Then I replied to them, "The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem."***

(Prayer)

Father, we come before You right now asking in these next twenty-five minutes that you anoint us to say what needs to be said so that we capture the main point of these three chapters. Father, don't let us get caught in the minor details. Help us major on the majors. Help me keep the main thing, the main thing this morning. Father, help as congregation, let us see as we drive through these chapters, let us see the portrait You are painting of a biblical leader from the book of Nehemiah. Please Father, don't let anyone of us dismiss this sermon series by saying I'm not a leader. As we mentioned last week, leadership is influence, and anybody

who has influence over people, or a person, is a leader to someone. Every one of us in here is a leader. We are leaders at home, school, work, in society, in our church, in government, in recreational centers in our community, and we need to lead in rising up and rebuilding the broken down wall of morality and ethics that seem to be crumbling, not just in our nation's cities, but in every part of our country. So Father, let us learn from Nehemiah how to lead, to rise up and build. It's in Your precious, precious Son's name we pray, amen.

If I can just give you a quick roadmap, I want you to see how I'm going to break down these three chapters. In these three chapters, there are three sections of thought that tie together. The first section that we're going to look at starts in verse 5 of chapter 1, and runs to chapter 2, verse 8. That's the first section of Scripture. They tie together. Here's how we know they tie together. In the middle of chapter 1 and 2, as it's broken down in our English Bible, Nehemiah tells us he is the king's cupbearer, and that ties together verse 11 of chapter 1, and verses 1-8 of chapter 2, so we are going to look at that section first. When we exit that section, we will then start in verse 9 of chapter 2, and go to the end of chapter 2, verse 20 because that section, in my mind, ties together. When we exit that section of Scripture, we're going to conclude the sermon, hopefully, in chapter 3 beginning with verse 1 through verse 32, the entire 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter. We're going to learn three things about biblical leaders from the book of Nehemiah this morning. I want to give them to you right up front. I want you to be ready for these so that when we're driving through this, you see it, you get it; you see what I told you we were going to see.

In the first section of Scripture, we will see that biblical leaders kneel before HIM, before they stand before him, and them. That's what we're looking for in the first section of Scripture, Nehemiah both kneeling, and Nehemiah standing. He kneels before the King of Heaven as he stands before the king of Persia. I don't want you to miss that. When we exit that section of Scripture and begin the next, we will see that Nehemiah doesn't lead based on secondhand information; he leads based on firsthand information. Nehemiah doesn't lead the people to rise up and rebuild the

broken down walls based on what he heard someone say; he leads based on what he saw himself in Jerusalem. When we exit that section, we're going to almost be to our destination, and that is in the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter. When we start in verse 1 of chapter 3 and we finally end in verse 32, we will see Nehemiah actually breaks the work down into manageable sections. You're going to see this wall that actually lay in ruins for years is now going to be rebuilt in record time. Why? Because Nehemiah breaks it down into a manageable section of work. Does everybody have that? At the end of each section, we're going to ask a question. I want you to passionately and purposely answer the question honestly, as we see that God has called us to rebuild the broken down walls of society, as we rebuild, or build, God's church.

Hananiah came to the palace where Nehemiah was and shared with him the news about the distress and the shame the people in Jerusalem were living in, and how the city gates were still burned by fire, the walls were broken down, and it broke Nehemiah's heart. Even though he's in the winter palace of King Artaxerxes, he did not let where he was at insulate him from where his people were. The next thing we know, he doesn't eat, he won't drink, he's fasting, mourning, weeping, and he finds himself, day and night, before the Lord in intercessory prayer for people living hundreds and hundreds of miles away. Wow. We concluded last week's sermon by asking you when the last time that happened to us. I don't know exactly when God puts it in Nehemiah's heart to do what God wants him to do, but I just want to believe based on how the book of Nehemiah is arranged that somewhere, at some point, while he was on his knees before God in prayer, his heart opened to the part he played in rebuilding the broken down walls of Jerusalem so that the people could begin to rebuild their lives as free people no longer living in exile, but living in the Promise Land. Nehemiah was going to stand every day for a four-month period before King Artaxerxes, but at some point after kneeling before God, he no longer wanted to serve as the king's cupbearer, he no longer wanted to be the chief of staff in Persia, he wanted to go to Jerusalem and to lead the people, personally, to rebuild the broken down walls.

Now, before Nehemiah would stand before the king, he would kneel before the King. Why? If he was going to do what he wanted to do, he was going to need permission from the king to leave. Please get this picture. He was not serving in American society where he was the chief of staff to the president of the United States and could quit any time he wanted to. He was serving under a ruthless monarch, a dictator. If you want to know a little bit about how this society was, just read what Saudi Arabia just did to a journalist, and that's not even close to how ruthless King Artaxerxes was. Here's what we know. Nehemiah ultimately understands that King Artaxerxes is not the sovereign of his life; the King of Heaven, not the king of Persia is the ultimate sovereign in his life. So, before he goes to work each day, he kneels before God in prayer. We can't stop here and walk through this prayer, but I want you to note that in verses 5-11 in Nehemiah chapter 1, Nehemiah's prayer is rooted in who God is. God is a covenant keeping God. He knows that God made a covenant with His people and that it was a conditional covenant because God was a covenant keeping God who made a covenant with those who love Him and those who kept His commandments, but He told them right up front, if you obey Me, here is what will happen, and if you don't, here's what will happen. Nehemiah recognized right off the bat that the reason the people were living like they were living without walls and gates, and in shame and reproach, was because they had broken God's laws. I want you to notice that when Nehemiah begins to pray, he doesn't blame anyone else for what's going on in their life, but he blames them. When he blames them, he's not praying for Israel without recognizing that he is a part of Israel. So when he begins to confess the sins of his people, he confesses his sins too, as well as his father's sins. Why? Because he identifies with the people.

If we could pause here for just a moment, it's time the church in America quits blaming everyone else for what's going on in America and recognize we are Americans too, and we play a part in what's wrong, on why the wall of the morality and of ethics are crumbling in our society. It's easy to confess everybody else's sins, but the sins you and I need to be confessing before God, who is the sovereign of our life, are our sins, you and I, the church of Jesus Christ. Listen to me. The very reason he falls on his knees before a covenant keeping God is because he knows God is a covenant

keeping God, and he knew there was a provision in the covenant that said if we blow it, if we sin, if we break the cuds, if we'll return, if we'll repent, if we'll sin, if we'll come back, then circumstances can and will change. God will bring us back home, and he asked God to remember His Word. Wow! See, the reason he knelt before God is because he knew things could be different; things didn't have to stay the same. He claimed God's Word. Do you realize your life, my life, and the life in the church, and life in America can change too if you and I will come to grips that our God is a covenant keeping God, but He didn't enter into a relationship with us based on an unconditional covenant, but he's given us an unconditional covenant. Based on that unconditional covenant that's been ratified by the blood of His Son Jesus Christ, God lets us know that when we sin against Him, there is still provision under the covenant for us to have fellowship fully restored to God if we'll just confess our sins to Him, He is faithful and just to forgive and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Can I just ask you this question? When you confess, are you confessing to a covenant keeping God? Then why do you refuse to believe you're clean? It is because your prayer is rooted in what you think about God and how others have treated you. You're not rooted in the promise and the Word of God.

When you come to the last verse, Nehemiah is now praying for God to give him success today and mercy in the sight of this man, and we know who this man is; it's King Artaxerxes because we now know he's the king's cupbearer. He's the chief of staff. Listen to me. He's praying today give me success. Today, give me mercy in the sight of this man. So I'll tell you what I believe, and I believe this with all of my heart. I believe that when Nehemiah dropped to his knees before God, he wasn't trying to get his way with God; he was wanting God to get His way with him. Will you quit praying to where you want God to do what you want Him to do because you believe you know best about your life! That's why most of us won't pray. It is because we say it doesn't do any good; God doesn't answer our prayer! No, what you're saying is God is not giving you what you want. That's not what prayer is for. When we sincerely fall on our face and our knees before God, it opens our heart to desire His will to be done on earth in our lives as it is being done in Heaven.

The next thing you know, he's got in his heart that he knows what God is wanting him to do, and that is to leave the palace and go back to Jerusalem and help them rebuild the broken down walls. The problem is he needs permission from the king and once he makes this request to rebuild the broken down walls, which evidently the king was opposed to being done, that's why Nehemiah was afraid to ask or say anything. He knew he could literally lose his life, and if he was going to lose his life, how could he do what God had put in his heart to do? So he goes to work for four months.

Let me tell you what I believe as I read this text; I just see this. Don't tell me I'm wrong; I just see this. At the start of the prayer, he's praying for days, weeks, and months, but at the end of the prayer as it's being recorded, as he's telling the story, he's now believing today is going to be the day God is going to answer his prayer. So in this day that he stands before King Artaxerxes, he is believing today is going to be the day, so he's looking for an opportunity today for his prayer to be answered. How many of you do that? How many of you pray, and you believe today is going to be the day God is going to answer your prayer, so it changes the way you do today because today you're looking for those signs, those opportunities for anything that lets you know today may be the day my prayer gets answered. I can't tell you how many times I've been in people's lives, they tell me what they want, and they look back at their life and can name opportunity after opportunity they didn't take advantage of. I want to go, how did you not see that? How did you not know? See, when we pray believing and know what God has put in our heart to do, we expect Him to do what He's leading us to do, and therefore, we look for those opportunities.

All of a sudden, the king said hey, what's wrong? You're sad, but you're not sick. Something must be wrong with your heart. Nehemiah didn't make this about public governmental policy; he made this personal. He didn't question the policy of the government because that was questioning the integrity of the king. He just said how can I be happy when the city where my fathers are buried is in the condition it's in? It changed it for Artaxerxes. This was no longer about public policy in matters of people's

lives that he knew nothing about, he was now talking with someone whose policy was affecting directly, and he respected this man because Nehemiah said I had never come to work sad. Wow, how many of us can say that? We've never let what's going on in our personal lives affect the job we did at work. So now, Nehemiah has the king's attention. The king says Nehemiah, what do you want to do? He said I want to go rebuild the walls, but I was afraid to say that, because he knew public policy was that those walls weren't going to be rebuilt because Jerusalem might then rebel. So he said I prayed to God. In other words, while he was talking, he was praying. Ok God, I'm trusting today is the day I'm supposed to say this because You are opening this door. He prayed, he said what he said, the queen was sitting there, and the next thing you know, Artaxerxes said how long are you going to be gone and when are you coming back. Nehemiah remembered, oh yeah, I need letters and provisions, he walked out of Artaxerxes' presence that day with permission to go to Jerusalem and build, and all the provisions he needed to lead the people to rise up and build. Why? Because he waited and he waited and he waited before God because he knew who was the real sovereign of his life.

Can I just ask you a question? Do you know who the sovereign of your life really is? Are you kneeling before Him so He can put in your heart what He wants you to do as we rise up and rebuild broken down walls?

Secondly, he headed to Jerusalem. Now, I love this. I know you're not going to like this; I love it. Let me set this up first. How many of you believe Star Wars would really have been what it was without Darth Vader? None of us. Where would Ariel have been and Little Mermaid be without Ursula? Aladdin without Jafar? Beauty and the Beast without Gaston? CS Lewis' great stories without the White Witch? You've got to have villains in stories for it to be real! Guess what? This story that we're reading about is real, and when Nehemiah gets to the border and possesses those letters, and Sanballat and Tobiah, and later Geshem hear what they're intended to do, they're going to be the villains, the oppositions, so get ready for this. Please don't think when God answers your prayer to allow you to do what He's put in your heart to do, don't think there are not going to be villains. There are. Can I just remind you of who our villain is? It is Satan. This is

why the New Testament tells us we don't wrestle against Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem; we wrestle against spiritual authorities, spiritual wickedness in the heavenly places. We wrestle against Satan and his evil forces, and that's why we wear the armor of God. Listen to this. Nehemiah didn't ride into town as the savior and announce what the people should be doing. When he got to Jerusalem, he got off his horse, and for three days, he did nothing, but he was doing something. He was checking out what he heard to see if it was really like what he heard it was.

Can I just say the world has made us look really wrong in a lot of areas because we don't stop as Christians to check it out before we act? Many of us base what we do on what someone else says it's like rather than checking it out for ourselves. I pray that what you hear about moves you, but before you ever fully engage in being in on what God is doing, you've got to quit listening to what others are saying, and you've got to check it out for yourself. You've got to experience it firsthand. You've got to see it, not just hear about it. Can I have an amen? See, biblical leaders kneel before HIM before they stand before others, and biblical leaders don't lead based on secondhand information; they lead based on firsthand information. So Nehemiah took three days, and before he would say anything to anyone else, he would secretly view the walls at night. That's when he made his detailed plan of what he was going to do.

Please listen to me if you're a leader. Two things are always going on in your life. You're either gathering information, or you're sharing information. Before you share, before you make a declaration, you better make sure that what you're sharing is right. You better make sure what you're going to do is necessary and needed. Does that make sense? Check it out.

Nehemiah checked it out and thought they needed to rebuild the wall. He told the people we need to rebuild, the people heard him say because he shared his story. Can I say this to you? It's ok to tell your story with people. There are some of you that don't believe people would follow you, but people would follow you if you would be a little more open, a little honest, and you would tell your God story because all of us have a God story. People don't want to follow you because of you; people want to follow you because they know what God's been doing in your life. You say

I'm not there yet. I know you're not there yet, but you're a long way from where you used to be. I'm telling you, husband, she will follow you now. I'm tell you, moms, the kids will follow you now. I'm telling you. That person you've blown it before, they will probably follow you now because you have a God story. The people wanted to rise up and build. That's what this is all about! That's what our lives are about! Our lives are about, as leaders, gathering information and declaring what God has put in our heart to do. That's what we need in our homes. That's what we need in our schools. That's what we need in our businesses. That's what we need in our branches of government. That's what we need in every section of society.

Now, as we close, when you get to chapter 3, don't you skip it. Every name is important. Here's what I want you to underline, every time the Bible says "next to him," every time the Bible says "next to them," and every time the Bible says "after him." You get this picture of this wall, scholars tell us it was maybe two and a half miles wide, and the wall was completely in ruin. There were the openings for the gates, and the gates were completely burned with fire. Nehemiah broke this work that people could not accomplish into manageable sections, and he just said to this person, would you just take this gate, would you take this gate, would you take this gate, and so on. Guess who started first. Elisha, the high priest. The high priest recognized how people were living, so he took off his priestly robe, rolled up his britches legs and his sleeves, and he went to work with the other priests, building a gate. This wall that people didn't believe could be built, suddenly Nehemiah just broke down into manageable sections, and said would you just work right here. Would you just build this little section of the wall? Would you build this little section of the wall? The next thing you know, everybody who was a part had a part. They started doing their part building their part, then there were people surrounding this city building a wall, and here is the picture. So and so stood next to so and so, so and so stood next to so and so, and on and on. That's the key! That's the key! Me not doing what I do in isolation from you; me doing what I do with you, next to you; us doing what we do together.

Can I ask you this question and you be honest? At Hardin, who are you standing next to? Some of us who attend really aren't us because you don't have anybody you're standing next to. You're still alone in a crowd. You're still isolated. Some of you got hurt years ago because you stood next to somebody and that person hurt you, so you won't stand with us anymore. You just come and sit, and you listen, go home, and do your own thing. That's got to stop. We are not going to let anybody be sovereign over our lives but God, and He has a plan for each one of us. That's not only to get over the hurt by which we've hurt ourselves with our own personal sin, but get over the hurt that other people have harmed us with their sin, and apply the blood of Jesus Christ to our lives. Realize we serve a covenant keeping God who wants us to rise up and rebuild the broken down walls of our society. My question is when you leave here today, will you live each day believing today may be the day God answers my prayer? Or will you ask if today, as a dad, a mom, a boss, an employee, or a leader, am I gathering, or am I declaring? I gather in the night, but I declare in the day. The last question is who am I standing next to? It is time some of you husbands got a little closer to your wives and stood next to her and rebuild the broken down walls of your home. It's time some of you wives move next to him and start building your part, not his part, your part. Let him build his part. We need to do that at work, at school, at church, and every area of our lives. We're going to close by asking you to get out of your seats and come down to these steps and say this week I will live aware of those three questions I need to ask myself each day. Let's ask God to help us be aware that we are biblical leaders and we will make a commitment to kneel before HIM before we stand before others, and therefore, we're going to live believing today may be the day that He opens the door in whatever we're praying about. We can't pray about it and not expect an answer, but many of us do. We pray, but we don't expect, so when the opportunity comes, we miss it. When God answer, He usually answers through us. Have you ever noticed that? It's because prayer is ultimately changing us. Are we gathering, or are we declaring? If you aren't doing either, something could be wrong. Yes, we need to have a day of rest in our lives, but we are leaders, so we are influencing someone. We have a vision, a hope, a dream, so we are either gathering information firsthand,

or we're sharing with those around us what that vision looks like, and we're asking other people to join us in rising and building. I really want this to sink into you this week; will you honestly say who am I going to build next to? It may be a person in your small group, a person on the team you serve with, it may be a family member, a dedicated believer, but each one of us needs somebody that we build next to, that we build a relationship with, that we take ownership with, that I'm going to do my part and recognize that my work is influencing them and theirs is influencing me.