

Painting the Portrait of a Biblical Leader

Free to Build

Did we have a wonderful time last Sunday or what gathering down in the bottoms? We just had a wonder day. A lot of people were worried about the weather, but it could not have been any better than what we got to experience down in the bottoms. Thank you for participating with us in our 125th Anniversary of Hardin Baptist Church.

Let's stand together and open our bibles to the Word of God. We're getting ready to begin the second half of our Ezra-Nehemiah series. We finished the book of Ezra a couple of weeks ago. But remember, originally in the Hebrew Bible, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah were not separated. They were together, so we're preaching them as a whole as we think about the topic of Free to Build. This morning we're going to begin the second half of this series as we will preach over the next five or six weeks through the book of Nehemiah, which will lead us up to our Birth of Christ series that we will be talking about in the month of December.

If you have your bibles, we're going to be speaking from verse 1 of chapter 1 to verse 8 of chapter 2, hopefully. We're going to try to cover that entire section of Scripture. We're only going to read the first four verses to set the context, but we want you to keep your Bible open because after the first few minutes of the sermon, we are going to discuss more than what we just read publicly. Listen to what the Word of God says as we open the book of Nehemiah. This is one of my favorite books of the Bible. It's the first Old Testament book that just really lit a fire under me. Nehemiah feels like a brother to me. I'm talking about like almost an identical twin. I've studied him and drawn inspiration from him for so long, so I just can't tell you how excited I am that we're ending this series on free to build by

speaking from the book of Nehemiah. I hope God uses this book in your life as He has my life.

Scripture

"The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah.

Now it happened in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the citadel, that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem. And they said to me, "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." As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven."

(Prayer)

Father, we praise You and thank You for this opportunity to gather on this another first day of a brand new week. We love the first day of a brand new week. Father, we love it primarily because we get to gather together as Your body and get to see folks we haven't seen all week. We get to have just a few minutes of conversation, but then we love just worshipping You and getting to sing to You, getting to pray to You, just getting to brag about who You are, and then getting to listen to Your Word. Wow! It's just the way to start a week. Father, we know that the start of this week is really all about getting us ready for the rest of the week because this isn't the end of the week; it's the first day of a brand new week. Father, thank You, thank You, thank You; we just can't imagine as we stand right here in Your presence getting ready to listen to Your Word what You have in store for us this week. Father, You are going to bring somebody into our path and we're going to get to be light and salt to them. We're going to get to be a representation of You to them. We're going to meet some people this week that don't read their Bible, that don't fellowship with You, know very

little about You, and as Paul talked about, we're going to be Your epistle; we're going to be Your letter. So Father, just speak to us right now. If we haven't already, let us have an encounter with You because we believe with all of our heart that Your Son Jesus is worthy. Thank You Father again ahead of time for letting us get in on what You're in on, and that's making Your name, Your glory known throughout the world. Father, right now though, zero us in on this book, this person named Nehemiah. Let us understand it in its historical context, but please help us make the right application for our lives today as Your church. Father, when this series is over, help us understand that You freed us just like You did Your Old Testament people to build Your house. But even in building Your house, there are still some walls that need to be rebuilt in our society. Thank You for letting us be in on that. In Your precious Son's name we pray, amen.

I think most of you would agree with me that probably the most famous portrait in the world is the portrait entitled, Mona Lisa. Do you realize the person who painted that portrait was born in 1452? Historians believe he began to paint that portrait somewhere around 1503, and finished it somewhere around 1507, but yet didn't finish it because he possibly worked on it for three to five more years before he finally finished it. Some historians believe it actually took him twelve years to finish the famous Mona Lisa. It now hangs in a French museum. Its insurable value, I understand, is eight hundred million dollars...wow! Can we just say by that value, the Mona Lisa is invaluable?

Here is what we're going to try to do as a church over the next few weeks. We're going to try to paint a portrait, not a portrait of the Mona Lisa, or a portrait that's going to hang in a museum somewhere, but a portrait that will hopefully hang in your heart and in your mind. What we're going to do is take the book of Nehemiah and hopefully, God will allow us to paint the portrait of a biblical leader over the next five to six weeks. We want you to allow us to take the paintbrush of God's Word and you present to us the canvas of your heart and your mind and let's let God paint the portrait of a biblical leader. His name is Nehemiah. To identify him from other people who bore that name at this time, they name his father. All of a sudden,

Nehemiah begins "Now it happened." I don't know about you, but any time I hear somebody talk about something that happened, I always have two questions: when did it happen, and what happened. I not only want to know what, I want to know when, and Nehemiah starts his book out by telling us when it happened, and what actually happened. It happened in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes. Artaxerxes began his reign in 464, 465 BC, so that would put this happening in about 444, 445 BC, thirteen years after Ezra left captivity and came to Jerusalem. Something is going to happen. It's in the month of Chislev. The Jewish people had two ways of starting their year. They had a sacred year and they had a spiritual year, a secular year. This is either the third month or the ninth month, depending on which way Nehemiah was counting. What happened? One of his brothers, Hananiah, along with some other men from Judah, came back to where he was, and Nehemiah couldn't wait to ask this question about the people who left and went back home. How are they doing? Tell me about the city of Jerusalem. Hananiah must have dropped his head when he said the people are in great reproach and shame. The wall in the city is still broken down, and its gates are burned with fire. Scripture says Nehemiah sat down and he wept. Then his weeping turned to mourning. His heart was so broken over what he heard that he couldn't eat. All he knew to do, which was the best thing to do, was to begin to pray to God. Wow! That's the context.

Have any of you ever gotten news like that where you actually had to sit down? You just burst into tears, began to weep, you began to mourn, you couldn't eat for days, and you found yourself day and night before God. The news that you heard happened over nine hundred miles away. It wasn't in your family. It wasn't in your work. It was literally far, far away. Has it ever happened to you? If it has, has it been a while, or has it been recently? See, we're going to get a snapshot into what I'm going to call a biblical leader. I believe being a biblical leader is synonymous with being a godly leader. So I think the Bible is going to paint a picture of a godly/biblical leader. One of the first principles we're going to learn as we close out this series about being free to build is that biblical leaders do not let where they are at insulate themselves from where others are. Did you get that? Biblical leaders do not let where they are at insulate themselves

from where others are. Where is Nehemiah? He's in the palace. Scholars tell me that this was the winter palace of Artaxerxes. Artaxerxes and all Persian rulers had a summer residence, a summer palace. This was the winter palace. It was fortified. It was luxurious. Let me just say that Nehemiah, as a Jew living in Persian culture, had arrived. He had it made. He was the cupbearer. Now, at this time, scholars tell us not to just see a man who put his life on the line every time the king got ready to drink, because there was a fear of one of his enemies poisoning him and so Nehemiah would drink the wine. He did drink the wine, but this position required someone of the most loyalty, the most trust, someone who had the king's very life in his heart, and by this time, this man had actually become one of the most loyal advisors. Scholars believe he was almost the highest ranking cabinet member Artaxerxes had. He would be what we would call today the Chief of Staff. This man had the ear of the king, and the king had his ear. And then he hears this news that just broke his heart. What was the news? The wall of Jerusalem was broken down.

Now we learned in Ezra that the temple has been rebuilt. It took a little while, twenty plus years. We learned from Ezra that was why God set His captives free. That's why God moved on King Cyrus' heart to issue a decree, so that his people could be set free from captivity and go back home and do what God wanted done, and that was build His house. We discovered from that, (the New Testament correlation is) God ultimately set you and I free from sin so that we could build God's house, but God's house is not a physical building. It's literally the church of Jesus Christ. Well, in the book of Nehemiah, the emphasis is not going to be on building a temple; it's going to be on the need of building a wall, and rebuilding gates. Now, you might ask, why in the world would someone be so upset over a physical wall around a city? The people not having a physical wall around the city was exactly what was causing them to live in reproach and shame. We've got to think just for a moment, don't think like Americans; let's think in the biblical world. In the biblical world, when you had a city, you built a wall around it. Please hear me. You didn't build a wall just to keep what was in, in, and what was out, out. The wall around your city wasn't to prevent people who wanted to be like you from getting into your life and your city. The wall was to keep people out who wanted to come

into your city and make you part of them. It wasn't about having a wall so that people who wanted to be like you couldn't be like you and you kept them out. Do you understand that difference? That's important, that we as Christians in America understand what this wall stood for. It was literally the salvation of the people. It was literally the strength of the people. It was literally the security of the people, and it broke Nehemiah's heart to know that while the people needed the temple, they also needed a wall and that wall was not built. Therefore, the people were living in reproach and shame, and it broke his heart.

Can I just say this? God doesn't just want us to build His church. He doesn't want us to just build His house. As New Testament believer/priests so that people can be right with Him, He wants other walls to be built by those of us who are building the church. They're not just walls for us; they're walls for everyone. God is not just concerned about those of us who are His people; He is concerned about society in general and at large too. Therefore, He not only wants us to be house builders; He wants us to be wall builders. Does that make sense?

Now, I want to propose in practical application to us, two walls that we need to be building as Christians while we build God's church. These two walls will be a great strength, a great security, and they'll be salvation to our people under Christ. The first wall I'm thinking about is the wall of ethics. The second wall that I'm thinking about is the wall of morality. I think God wants us to be leaders in our homes, our schools, our businesses, our government branches, and in our recreational centers. What He wants us to see is unless there is a strong wall of ethics and of morality, most people will live in reproach and shame. Guys, if we're not careful, where God has brought us to, it is easy for us to live insulated and isolated from the world of people around us, and not really get what's going on. Nehemiah didn't live that way. Why? Because Nehemiah was a godly man. Nehemiah was a biblical leader, and therefore, God is going to start putting in his heart this desire to go back, leave where he is to go help others build a wall with gates that are fortified. Again, not to keep others who want to be like us out, but literally, to fortify us from those who want to take us captive again and cause us to be like them.

Let's be clear here in the beginning. There is a difference between ethics and morality. You realize that, right. In our culture, it's becoming blurred. If you don't believe it's becoming blurred, just surf the internet and you'll see that most people are now saying that morality and ethics are the same and they're synonymous, and they're not. Please hear me say this. Your morality doesn't determine your ethics. Your ethics determine your morality. Why do I say that? Ethics come to us from an external source. Ethics are the norms. They're the standards. Morality is a word that is descriptive of who we are. So here's the difference: morality deals with is, and ethics deals with ought. Ethics is who we ought to be aspiring to be and do. It's the standard. It's the norm. Morals deals with the is. Here's where we're going to struggle, and I want to be honest with you. We saw this in Ezra, and we're going to see this in Nehemiah. There's going to be opposition, and I think you realize this. You and I in America are really living in the first generation where our society no longer values us. Agreed? Therefore, there is now hostility toward the church and towards Christians and what we believe. Let me explain to you what I think is happening. I'm just a pastor, not a prophet. We are a republic as a nation that uses democratic principles to elect our representatives. But what you're seeing in our society is a lot of surveying and a lot of polling going on. Anytime the meter gets to 51% of what people believe, then there is just this thought that should be the new norm. That should be the new standard, therefore, if everybody is doing it, the question is no longer should they be doing it; the question is they are doing it, so if the majority is doing it, then it ought to be ok to do it. Did that make sense to anybody? Therefore, you and I are now living in a different culture than any American has probably ever lived in as a Christian. Morality is not determining ethics instead of ethics determining morality. See, we have to strive to be ethical, but our ethics come from an external source. You know who that external source is; it's God. As a matter of fact, when we get into Nehemiah's prayer, he's going to talk about God's laws, God's statutes, and God's rules. Let me just say that God's laws, God's statutes, and God's rules are our ethics. They declare to us what the norm is, what the standard is, what we ought to be aspiring toward. So your ethics influence your morals.

Does anyone see the problem? We've got to start first by building ethics, and then we in the church, as we establish ethics in our homes, in our schools, our businesses, in whatever governmental branch you influence, and in our recreational pursuits, then those ethics influence our morals. They tell me what's right, they tell me what's wrong, and therefore, they help me understand where I'm right and where I'm wrong. This will never come through legislature. It's got to come through you and I being leaders at home with our families because family will always be the foundational fabric of society. From there, we branch out. In the book of Ezra, we want you to believe with all of your heart that you are a believer/priest of God, and you are responsible for helping build God's house, but most of us as Christians leave Ezra to the pastors, theologians, and the scholars. But that's why God gave us Nehemiah, because Nehemiah did it where we are; he did it at home. He did it at work.

Now, I don't want you to make this distinction. I don't want you to see what you do at church as sacred and what you do in the world as secular. I believe to God, all of life is sacred, not just what you do on Sunday, but what you do Monday through Saturday is just as sacred to God. I think that God is just as concerned about you when you're at work, at home, at school, and when you're recreating, as He is what you do when you're in here. You say hold it Bro Ricky...I'm not a leader! Yes, you are. Do you know how leadership is basically defined at its core value? Leadership is influence. You cannot tell me that there's not anyone in here who does not have some influence with somebody. Correct? You're a leader. If you still live at home, and you're the oldest child and you're 8, you're a leader because your 6 year old brother or sister looks up to you and you have influence with them. Now listen to me. Here's the first thing that's got to happen in our lives. We've got to quit letting where we are insulate us from where others are. If we're going to lead, we've got to understand our wives, and our children. If we're a teacher, we have to understand our students. If we're an administrator, we have to understand our teachers. If I'm an employee, I've got to understand my fellow workers. If I'm the employer, I need to understand where my employees are. If I'm the coach, it's not just about understanding what's happening on the field, I've got to understand what's happening in those lives preventing that person from

contributing to the team the way they should. Do you understand that there's a great responsibility for us, and that's not just to see us, but to see those around us. Some of us have gotten to a place in our lives where I hear you say I just don't understand so and so...are you kidding me? How can we lead someone if we don't understand them? That's the responsibility that falls on our shoulders! If we're going to truly build a wall of morality, if we're going to build a wall of ethics that's going to influence our nation for the glory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We are going to pick this up next week, but before we get all fired up and want to go build a wall, let's mention the second principle. Before Nehemiah stood before the king and the people, he knelt before God. Biblical leaders not only do not let where they are insulate themselves from where others are they always kneel before God before they stand before men. Can we be real? When was the last time your prayer wasn't out of habit, but it was out of conviction and compassion because instead of being angry you were heartbroken over what sin is doing? Father, put a desire in our hearts to be wall builders at home, at school, at my workplace, and let me quit passing the buck to somebody else and realize I the one you want to use.