

# Standing as One

## Free to Build

Nehemiah

Let's go ahead and read our Scripture. Turn to the book of Nehemiah chapter 8 as we come to the conclusion of our Ezra/Nehemiah series. We have this morning and next Sunday morning in the series called Free to Build. We finished the book of Ezra, and now we're in the second half of that series from the book of Nehemiah. This morning we're going to try to cover chapters 7, 8, 9, and 10. Because we're trying to cover four chapters, it will not be a paragraph-by-paragraph study or a word for word study. We're going to try to look into these four chapters and see the main thing that God would have us as we try to understand today New Testament corollary of the book of Nehemiah is that we are free to build. Let's read the first three verses of Nehemiah chapter 8, but be mindful that this is not an exegesis of these three verses. This just kind of gives us the heartbeat of what's going on in this section of Scripture of Nehemiah. If I were to give today's sermon a title, it would be Standing as One as we're free to build.

### Scripture

***"And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the Lord had commanded Israel. So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law."***

(Prayer)

Father, one more time, we bow before you. We can never bow before You too much. We just want to declare our dependency upon You. You know we desire nothing to be done in this church through the flesh. We want everything to be done through the empowerment of Your Holy Spirit as You use us who are in a weak flesh for Your honor and Your glory. Father, now we ask that You give us the ability to hear and to speak. We ask that You anoint us, not to be hearers or speaker only, but be doers of Your Word. Father, give us a fresh encounter with the book of Nehemiah, and especially the person of Nehemiah as we look into his face and see the portrait of a biblical leader. Right now each one of us submit the canvas of our heart, our mind to You for You to draw afresh in our lives a portrait of who You want us to be as a biblical leader, realizing that all of us have influence with someone, as much as some of us run from being a leader, You have called all of us to be. In Your precious Son's name, we thank You for the anointing, in Jesus name we pray, amen.

If you are like me and were raised in the south, but especially raised out in the country, I'm sure there was a time where you found yourself out in the yard, or in a room in the house, and all of a sudden, someone said these words to you: "Were you raised in a barn?" Immediately you didn't answer; you didn't say no, you didn't say yes, you just knew you had left the door open. If you were in the front yard, you went and closed the door, or if you were inside the house, you went back to the room where your door is and closed that door. Isn't it amazing how sometimes something as trivial and easy as closing the door, we forget because it's so easy to get distracted by the things that's going on in our life that seem to be so much more important.

As we begin Nehemiah chapter 7, the wall is finished. The twenty-fifth day of the sixth month, the month of Elul, they finished the wall. The wall was built so fast that all of the people around as they thought about what the Jewish people had done, could only give credit for it being done to the good hand of God. Now Nehemiah, literally in the first five verses of chapter 7, hands the key to the city to Hanani and Hananiah. Please, I want to make sure you understand what's going on here. The wall is built,

the gates are built, the doors are in place, and one of the last things Nehemiah is going to do in our story is he is going to literally set gatekeepers, then he's going to hand the key to the city to Hanani, his brother, who we met in the first chapter, and to Hananiah. He's going to make sure they understand that as he now trusts them to manage the city he wants to make sure they understand how important it's going to be. Until the city gets repopulated with people, it's going to be so important for them not to leave those gates open as they normally would be, but to actually keep them closed most of the time.

Here's going to be our first biblical principle in this section of Scripture; there will only be two. Biblical leaders know when to turn the work over to the managers. Let that sink in. I personally believe there's a difference between being a leader and being a manager. Let me tell you what I think the difference is. Leaders, generally, specifically, are concerned about doing the right thing; managers are usually concerned about doing things right. Does that make sense? Leaders are normally big picture people. They have the vision. They set the direction. Managers generally aren't big picture people. They're into the details. Leaders are usually concerned about what we're doing, and managers are concerned about how we're doing what we're doing. Praise God for Nehemiah! Basically, he had done what God had led him to leave the palace to do, and that's to rebuild the broken down walls of the city and to lead the people to do it. Now, he turns the key of the city over to Hanani and Hananiah. I like to think Hanani is the mayor, and Hananiah is the chief of police. Here's the picture the Bible is going to paint. The city with its wall is wide and large, but there's hardly anybody living in the city. When you look at the residential neighborhoods in the city, other than the temple and the wall, hardly anything is being built. Then here's what Nehemiah does, and this is going to sound strange. He's going to gather all the people together in chapter 7, so that he can enroll them by genealogy. Then when you read the rest of Nehemiah chapter 7, you're just going to see, again, who everybody is the son of. That's going to bore many of us, but something is going on here. For many people, the book of Nehemiah is about rebuilding the broken down walls of Jerusalem, but that gets finished in chapter 6, and there's now seven more chapters to go. As a matter of fact, chapter 7 is getting

ready to set the foundation for what's going to happen in chapter 11, and that is Nehemiah is going to turn it over to the city managers to come up with a plan on how to repopulate the city of Jerusalem because as it goes in the nation, so it will go in the city of Jerusalem. As it goes in the city of Jerusalem, so it's going to go in the life of the nation. What I want us to think about so that we don't lose sight over the next two weeks is that we've taken the walls of Jerusalem literally and spiritually challenged us as a new covenant people of God to understand there are still walls we need to be building while we build the temple of God, which is the church of Jesus Christ, and that is for a strong society, we need the wall of morality and the wall of ethics to be rebuilt in our nation. Does everybody agree? But now, the rest of this book is going to be about the city, and I had this thought; in the New Testament, we see there are several metaphors for the church. There is the metaphor of the building; therefore, we have no trouble seeing the church as the Old Testament corollary of the temple. The New Testament bridges that gap for us. Secondly, we know that sometimes the church is painted as the body of Christ, and other times the church is painted as the bride of Christ. Does anybody remember in the book of Revelation when John sees the great marriage supper of the Lamb and everyone is invited? All of a sudden in the vision, we have a new heaven and a new earth, then John gets taken up in a high mountain, and God says hey look, here comes the bride of Christ. John gets ready to see the bride of Christ, and what did the angel show him? A city...New Jerusalem. Whoa! In the book of Revelation, chapters 21 and 22, New Jerusalem is not a place; it's a people. Tell me you see that. Follow me.

This past week I had someone who made an appointment with me. They came to my office and they were really struggling with theology. They had this problem, "I just don't see God wanting too many people to be saved." I made this statement, "Then why did God build a city and reveal it to us in the book of Revelation that's fifteen hundred miles long, fifteen hundred miles wide and fifteen hundred miles tall?" Does anybody get that? Can you imagine how many people you could put in a city that was fifteen hundred miles long, fifteen hundred miles wide and fifteen hundred miles tall? Wow! So I'm telling you that the final picture of the church in eternity

is there are going to be that many people that it takes a city that big to hold them all! Wow!

Now follow me...we know what God did to save people. He put Jesus on a cross, and salvation is literally faith in the finished work of God on a cross. But who did God give the responsibility to of taking that good news to the ends of the earth? He gave it to you and I. so as you and I finish reading the book of Nehemiah, I don't want you to think once we build the temple, once we build the wall of morality and ethics, that our work is over. I want you and me to see that God gives us the responsibility in the New Testament under the new covenant of populating the city of God, which again is building God's house. Wow! Here's what the first thing the Bible does; he gets everybody together and says do you know who you are. But when he gets them together, he doesn't list all the people who are now building the wall and who are going to accompany the city. He goes back and pulls up this genealogy, the same one we had in the book of Ezra that relists all the people who came out of Babylon and came back to Jerusalem to help build the temple. He gives it to us almost verbatim. Do you see what he's trying to do? He's trying to show the people now how they are related to the people here and that ultimately we are God's children. We are going to spend a whole chapter emphasizing identity, identity, identity.

Can I just pause again and ask you this question? Do you know who you are, really; no doubt; you wouldn't compromise at all, ever, your identity? If we're not careful, we can tell people who we are and then at certain times compromise that just a little bit. I want to give you an example, and I have permission to share this. Last Saturday was a big day in our family. There is a Saturday in November that's a big day ever since Celisa and I have been married. It's the Saturday that the University of Kentucky places the University of Tennessee in football. Anybody that knows anything about college football knows this year has been different in Kentucky and Tennessee. I mean Kentucky Wildcat people...have we had the year of all years? Absolutely amazing. Tennessee people...I know. You've got to know this. Ever since I've been married, (I've only been married once to my wife, Celisa) she's always told me she is from Tennessee; born in Paris, raised in Puryear, basically. So, her blood's not red; it's orange when it comes to

playing football. So this Saturday is big; she calls me the eternal optimist on that date. Now get this picture; this year was different. This year Kentucky came into that game with a 7-2 record, and Tennessee came into that game with a 4-5 record. Kiki and I are in the chair watching TV, the game is getting ready to kick off, and Celisa comes down the hall into the opening and she announces to me and Kiki, "I just want ya'll to know I can't lose today." "Oh, you're going to lose today." "No, I'm from Tuckessee." I've never heard her say she was from Tuckessee before...You know what it means to be from Tuckessee, right? Tuckessee is a word that means a region of where people in Kentucky and Tennessee are kind of alike, but they're not alike, so we talk about a region where we take part of the word, Kentucky, and part of the word, Tennessee, put them together, and have this word called Tuckessee, and suddenly, Celisa is claiming to be from Tuckessee. Therefore, she can't lose today. She begins to tell us how she's really rooting for Kentucky today because she's from Tuckessee and understands how important this game is to Kentucky. Then they kick the ball off, unfortunately. After about thirty seconds, you knew Kentucky was not going to play like they've been playing, and Tennessee was not going to play like they've been playing, and after halfway through the first quarter, it was obvious that she was no longer from Tuckessee. She was rubbing it in our faces; she was born in Paris and raised in Puryear, to the point that I just went deer hunting the rest of the afternoon!

Now for just a moment, she compromised...and I'm afraid that's what some of us do. We go into a situation, believing, letting everybody know we're a Christian, and all of a sudden, a situation comes up and before you know it, no, we're not really acting like we're a Christian. We're not really acting like we're a child of God. We have compromised our identity to look more like the world and actually believe it's ok to act like the world in this particular moment. That's not acceptable. Don't read over the genealogy of Nehemiah thinking it's boring. Read over the genealogy of Nehemiah understanding that God wants us to nail down, once and for all, as we rebuild the broken down walls and we help populate the city, that we are His child. When the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter ends, here's what the Bible pictures. Hardly anybody is living in the city of God; everybody is living in their own town. When the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter opens, it's the seventh month. If you go back to the

book of Leviticus, the seventh month is an important month for the children of Israel because there are some festivals that they're going to celebrate. Nehemiah has chosen to get the people together to enroll them in a genealogy, and when he gets them together in the square before the water gate, all of a sudden, this group of people, because they've just finished building the wall in fifty-two days, they stand as one man. Have you ever noticed in Scripture, especially in the New Testament book of Acts, when the Bible talks about them being in one accord, great things would happen? I'm just telling you that when the people of God unite, there is more power in us being united than us being divided. The motto of our nation says "united we stand, divided we fall." If the church doesn't unite, we will fall! Can I just say, when we divide, usually it means that we don't really put our trust in God.

Nehemiah is going to fade into the background because he's turned the key over. He's still the leader, but now we need managers. Ezra, the scribe, steps up, and he has the Word of God because the people are desiring the Word of God, and this is the second principle of a biblical leader. Please catch this. Biblical leaders create a hunger and a thirst, in the lives of those who follow them, for God. When you follow a biblical leader, it doesn't take long for you to come to understand that biblical leader has the anointing of God on him. It's obvious he gets his message from God, and he's all about God, he's all into God's Word, and that just rubs off on us. So these people have been following Nehemiah and they know the good hand of God has been upon him, so they say to Ezra to bring the Word. Ezra steps forward and he brings the Word. Now, the Word is the Law. It is the Old Testament book of Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Exodus, Genesis, and Numbers. Ezra starts reading early in the morning. Somebody tell me what early in the morning is to you. 5:00, 5:30, 4:00? Ok, 8:00 people go ahead, I know you're ashamed, but raise your hand! It's ok, I understand; you probably don't go to bed until 2:00 in the morning. That's ok. Get this picture; early in the morning, let's compromise and make it 7:00. At 7:00 in the morning, Ezra starts reading. It's early in the morning and he reads until midday. That's five hours. If you make early in the morning 8:00, that's four hours! Listen to what the Bible says; the people's "ears were attentive to the words of the Law." We're not talking about listening to John Piper, Adrian

Rogers, John McArthur; we're talking about listening to Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and the people's ears were attentive.

That reminds me of what happened years ago to me. This honestly happened; true story. I was standing at the back door, which is really the front door, but it's the front door to me. I don't stand back there much anymore, but I was standing there and there was a new family coming to Hardin for several weeks. It got embarrassing because they stopped as they were shaking my hand and they just started saying, "Oh, Bro Ricky, we wish you would quit looking at that clock. We wish you would just preach on and on and on. We just can't get enough of your preaching. It's changing our lives! We could literally listen to you preach all day long!" Before I could say anything, there was a lady behind them, who was older, who was here at Hardin before I got her, and has heard every sermon I have ever preached, and she just immediately blurted out, "Just wait until you've been here a few years!" Have many of us been doing this so long that our ears aren't attentive anymore to the Word of God?

Verse 4 will give more detail about the same event. Nehemiah, writing this book, is going to say that they had built a wooden platform for Ezra to stand on so that when he stood in front of the people in the square facing the water gate that he was above the people. So when he opened the book to start reading above the people, they're giving the Word of God the honored place in society. When Celisa and I went to Europe several years ago, I was amazed at all the churches that we went into that did not have the pulpit in the center of the church. They had the Lord's Supper in the center of the church, over to the side they had the pulpit, and on the other side, they had a pulpit. Nothing was done from the center of the church; everything was done from the side pulpits. Do you know why the Baptist Church puts the pulpit in the center of the church? It is so the priority will not be what we do for God, but what God says to us in His Word! Ezra stands above the people, and he reads. As he starts reading, we don't know exactly when, but all of a sudden, the people stand. How many of you complain when we stand for twenty minutes to sing! The people were so hungry for God's Word; they stood for hours to hear God's Word! Their ears, their mind, were not in tune with what they're going to do this

afternoon, but totally focused on God and His Word. Somebody shouted amen, let it be so! Somebody else shouted amen, let it be so! As the people heard God's Word, they began to bless God, but in blessing God, they raised their hands, palms up, which was the position that said I'm getting to hear God's Word, I don't want to miss any of it! They held their hands up to God to let God know by my hands that my heart, my mind, is the position to receive Your blessing because I'm going to be blessed because I'm getting to hear Your Word. The blessing was so immense that there came a time when they turned those hands down and bowed their face in full humility, and they worshipped God, recognizing they weren't worthy of what they were receiving from Him. Wow!

I don't know if you have this experience like I have, but when I begin to read God's Word, it seems like God's Word begins to read me. From what happens next, here's what you get the idea of. The people began to weep, to cry, to be convicted of sin because they're hearing about God's covenant relationship with them, about what God has done and what they are supposed to be doing. They realize they haven't been doing it, so they begin to weep. Ezra has to say whoa, whoa, whoa, no crying, no weeping. Today is a holy day. It is the first day of the seventh month. This is the day when Israel would blow the trumpets announcing we've got a brand new year started with God. This was to be a day of rejoicing. There could be no mourning on this day. The people are mourning because they're being convicted of sin, so the leadership has to say no. Dry up your tears. Dry up your tears. This isn't a day to cry; this is a day to go home and party. Can I just say this? Here's another thing about being under God's Word. When God's Word convicts, it doesn't lead to condemnation, it leads to change, and that's a reason to rejoice. Amen! That was worth whatever you put in the offering plate! He literally says go home and drink your best drink, grill a filet mignon, or a prime rib because today is a day of rejoicing.

You see, the group that met was men and women and all who could understand. Several times, it mentions and all who could understand. So now they're going to go home rejoicing because they could understand. I think what this means is every man, every women, and their kids who were old enough to understand the Word, and everybody there that day

who understood went home and partied because they could understand God's Word. I pray we leave this morning and can literally go home and rejoice because God has anointed us with the ability to have eyes that see and ears to hear the things of God. That changes our life. So let's not leave here, go into a restaurant, and be rude! Let's not leave here, go home, and get into a fight with our spouse. Let's not leave here and even decide what we need to do tomorrow yet. Let's leave here and rejoice that God has given us the spiritual ability to understand His Word.

I want you to watch this. They're going to reinstitute booths, and it's going to be the twenty-fourth day of the month. When you start chapter 9, it's not Ezra or the Levites reading the Word, now it seems the people gather and they read the Word for a quarter day, then they confess sins for a quarter day. Now, let's just do the math. Let's not make day literally be twenty-four hours. Let's make day be what daytime is, twelve hours. What is a fourth of twelve? Three. For three hours, people got together and individually read the Word...wow...Then do you know what they did? Another quarter day, (which is three more hours, so for six hours) they read the Word and confessed their sins. Conviction should lead to confession. A mistake many of us make is we get convicted, but we never deal with what we're convicted about. I am so tired of living in a society that always wants to blame somebody else for what's wrong in my life. Get over it. I respectfully say that. My Bible says that we can come to Jesus as our High Priest in our time of need, and in the nick of time, we will receive mercy and grace. They confessed! And someone shouted. And someone else said it's time to bless the Lord, and they blessed the Lord. When they blessed the Lord, they started with God being Creator. They blessed Him because He chose Abraham and made a covenant with him. They blessed God because God called Abraham's people out of Egypt and didn't leave them there as slaves, and parted the Red Sea for them, led them through the Wilderness, fed them, gave them a cloud and pillar of fire to lead them, and when they sinned against Him after He spoke to them from the mountain, the only people to ever hear their God talk to them, they blessed Him that He was gracious and forgiving. Then they just took off about how every time God would bless, they would sin, fall short, but instead of God wiping them out, He would give them another chance. Then

they blessed Him that they were out of Babylon, now back in the land, but they recognized they were still living under someone else's authority and not just His. Hey guys, when is the last time you really blessed God? Isn't it sad that we don't realize how merciful and graceful He has been to us?

By the time we transition from chapter 9 into chapter 10, here is what's going on. The people say it is time we make an agreement with God. If you read the ESV or KJV, it will say covenant, but this is not the normal word for covenant. As a matter of fact, if you read your Bible, God always initiates covenants, not man. Here, you've got the people of God, after hearing the Word, realizing we're living under the Mosaic Covenant, God's called us to be His people, He said there would be blessings but there could be cursings if our behavior went a certain way, and they realized they have been in captivity because of their own personal sin, so now they want to make an agreement with God to say we are never going to do what we used to do, and so they make an agreement with God. They basically say God, no longer are we going to give our daughters to foreigners or let our sons marry foreigners. I want to pause here because of where we're at as a country and make sure you hear me say this. God is not saying this based on the color of someone's skin. He's saying this based on the color of someone's heart. Don't disappoint me out here in the community. Don't disappoint our church. Don't disappoint our God. He has broken down the wall of race! Then they say to God, we will no longer buy and sell on the Sabbath. We will no longer farm that seventh year that you told us not to farm so to let the land rest. In that seventh year, we won't collect the debts that somebody owes us. We will not neglect Your house again. They name all these things...we will pay the shekel tax, tithe off our grain and off our food. We'll bring the firstborn to You, whether it be our children or animals. We'll make sure this altar has wood every day so we'll bring the wood offering. We will not neglect Your house. That's how the story is going to end.

Here is what I want you to see as application. When you and I hunger for God's Word and have ears that really are attentive to the Word of God, and God begins to convict us and it leads us to confess our sins, ultimately, it brings us to the place to see that we don't want to neglect God's house.

Let me give you the New Testament corollary. Let's quit giving our children to the world. Let's quit letting the world influence our children. So many of us have so bought into an American way of life that we do not realize the damage we're doing to our children by giving them to the world and letting the world be the number one influence in their lives, and we don't even see it because we have so compromised being a Christian living in the world around us that many of us don't even know the difference anymore. Don't give your sons and daughters to the world. Can I say this? I'm pointing four fingers at me when I say this. Let's keep one day holy, set apart, and preferably, that day be the first day of a brand new week. The priority of that day should be about God and worship, and not about us, sports, our kids, or anything else, but about Him. When somebody asks how you can do what you do and really take a day off, you get to tell them why. That is because of who He is to you, a holy God who wants one day of our seven to look different. Could we be more generous? Some of us need to stop and quit trying to earn for ourselves, and give. Help somebody instead of just entering into business deals and relationships with people where they totally benefit us and we keep others totally indebted to us, but we really live to give others a chance to get out from what we used to be under, and that's slavery. Then, would you not neglect the house of God? Here's how you do it in the New Testament. You don't be legalistic. You just realize I'm a part; therefore, I'm going to do my part. Here's what's neat about this. We're not under an if/then covenant. We're under an unconditional covenant. We're under a covenant that says we are who we are, not based on what we do; we are who we are based on what He did for us...wow! Therefore, we don't serve Him because we have to, we don't serve Him for how it benefits us; we serve Him for the glory of His name and for the establishment of His Kingdom. Can we make this commitment right now as a group, standing as one? We will not neglect Your house. To make it real, let's say, "I will not neglect Your house."