

## ***Nehemiah Series – Rebuild. Restore. Renew.***

### **- BIBLE READING – Nehemiah 3:28-4:6 – Be Builders; Not Consumers**

#### **Nehemiah 3**

**(vv28 – 4:6)** <sup>28</sup> Above the Horse Gate, the priests made repairs, each in front of his own house. <sup>29</sup> Next to them, Zadok son of Immer made repairs opposite his house. Next to him, Shemaiah son of Shecaniah, the guard at the East Gate, made repairs. <sup>30</sup> Next to him, Hananiah son of Shelemiah, and Hanun, the sixth son of Zalaph, repaired another section. Next to them, Meshullam son of Berekiah made repairs opposite his living quarters. <sup>31</sup> Next to him, Malkijah, one of the goldsmiths, made repairs as far as the house of the temple servants and the merchants, opposite the Inspection Gate, and as far as the room above the corner; <sup>32</sup> and between the room above the corner and the Sheep Gate the goldsmiths and merchants made repairs.

#### **Nehemiah 4**

<sup>1</sup> When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews, <sup>2</sup> and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, "What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble—burned as they are?"

<sup>3</sup> Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, "What they are building—if even a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones!"

<sup>4</sup> Hear us, O our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. <sup>5</sup> Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from your sight, for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders.

<sup>6</sup> So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart.

### **3: Ch 3:28-4:6 – Be Builders; Not Consumers.**

Good Morning.

A few weeks ago I spoke to you from the book of Nehemiah as I began a preaching series from the book, which I had titled, Rebuild. Restore. Renew.

As I mentioned last time, I love the book of Nehemiah. In some ways it is a great piece of history as a Nation, led by Nehemiah, rebuilds itself after having been scattered throughout the surrounding nations as a result of war and conflict. But it is also a book that shows the faithfulness of God in calling his people back together and re-establishing within them the identity that they were created to have, as God's chosen people.

From chapters 1 and 2, we saw the problem: that Nehemiah had asked some men whom he knew about the remnant that survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem, and their response wasn't great. They talked about how those that survived were in great distress and troubled, and that the walls of Jerusalem were still laying in ruins. And so Nehemiah weeps.

Then a few months later there is an encounter between Nehemiah, who is the cupbearer to the king, and the King himself. And in a moment of boldness, having prayed, Nehemiah tells the foreign king, King Artaxerxes, about what was wrong, and the King graciously grants Nehemiah's request to go and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. But not only that, King Artaxerxes also provides Nehemiah with letters to ensure safe travel, and he also gives him a huge load of supplies in order to assist with the rebuild. It is a great story where we got to see the vision that God gave to Nehemiah, and we saw that God went ahead of him, which allowed the king to grant his request.

But through that passage, we were challenged about the importance of Prayer. We were challenged to acknowledge who God is, to confess our sins, ask great things of God, and to pray with persistence.

Well today we are moving on in Nehemiah into chapters 3 and 4. Please keep your bibles out as I will be moving around a bit throughout those 2 chapters, as we look at the importance of being builders; not consumers.

But before we continue, let us pray.

- **PRAY**
- **A Big Task**

I want you to think about the biggest task you have ever been involved in. Maybe you have built a house, raised kids, participated in a marathon, or even worked your way through 3 or 4 long years of university. Whatever the task is, I recon many of us have been involved in some pretty big tasks throughout our lives.

I remember back in 2011 Kathryn and I challenged ourselves to a big task. We had friends who were living in Indonesia at the time, and whilst back in 2009 we had gone and visited them, we wanted to go and visit them again in 2011. But as we started to dream about what we would do in this holiday, we decided that we also wanted to Visit Malaysia. It would also be our 2<sup>nd</sup> visit to Malaysia, and so we thought we would do something different and go to a different part of Malaysia; to a place many of you will know... Kota Kinabalu.

Now going there wasn't the challenge itself, but what we planned to do at the end of our trip was something that we had never even considered before, and that was to climb what is considered to be one of the tallest mountains in South East Asia. As most of you know, Mount Kinabalu is considered to be for Malaysia, as Mount Kosciuszko for Australia. With one pretty major difference. The summit of Mt Kosciuszko sits at around 2228m, or 7,310 feet, above sea level. Whereas Mount Kinabalu sits at 4095.2m, or 13,435 feet, above sea level.

I think when we were planning to climb this mountain, I didn't really understand the gravity of what we were planning to do. We had said that we would train so that we were fit enough to do it, but we never got around to training for it. Oops.

I remember so many things about that trip. I remember seeing the mountain for the first time, as we were taking a flight to another part of Malaysia, and flew past it, and the feeling sinking in that this is a big task we have set for ourselves.

I remember getting to the base of the mountain, getting ready to find our guide that was going to be with us. I even remember most of the walking we were doing, as we put one foot in front of the other, and had to just keep going, as our guide would constantly say, "Slowly slowly. Slowly slowly."

I remember towards the end of the first day as we finally arrived at base camp, and no sooner after stepping in the door of the building, it then starting to bucket down with rain.

I remember looking out the window and seeing this torrential waterfall coming down off the rocks which we were to walk on early the next morning.

I even remember going to bed early that night, and exhausted from a long day of constantly walking up this steep mountain, with this pain in my legs that wouldn't go away, and hearing the rain bucketing down, I

remember so clearly laying in the uncomfortable bed, just hoping... pleading for the decision to be made very early in the morning that the rest of the climb had been called off due to it being unsafe given the weather. You see... I didn't want to quit, because we had told everyone back home what we were doing, but if the decision was to be taken out of our hands, then we could at least go home with our heads held high.

However, when 2am hit, the call went out for us all to wake up and get ready to continue the journey in order to reach the summit for Sunrise – the weather had cleared, and so I had no choice... I had to get up, and I had to finish what I had started.

Well we didn't quite make the summit for sunrise, but we weren't much later, and let me tell you this... as you stand on top of that mountain, above all the clouds, it is an incredible sight. We had made it. We were on top of the world.

There are so many things I could share about that experience, but one thing I have taken away from it is that despite how big the task may be, despite how big the challenge is, we needed to keep going, slowly slowly, step by step. In so many ways, giving up was not an option, but let me tell you, the reward was spectacular.

As we begin to read Nehemiah, we are confronted by something... What Nehemiah had been called to do was no small task. It was a massive task, and even makes my task of climbing to the top of Mount Kinabalu seem insignificant.

Now the wall that Nehemiah was constructing was quite different in size to that of the previous wall of Jerusalem. This wall was much smaller, but then the population of Jerusalem was also much smaller, so they didn't need a wall as big as it previously was. But despite it being much smaller, it is still a massive task.

Now it is very difficult to find information on how big the wall really was. In fact, when I was trying to find this sort of information out, whilst most books don't even mention any dimensions at all, those dimensions I did find tended to conflict quite a bit. However, it seems probable that one part of the wall that Nehemiah repaired, which was from King Hezekiah's reign, was around 5 metres wide. As for the rest of the wall that Nehemiah repaired and built, my research suggests that the absolute minimum width of the wall would be around 1-1.5 metres, and obviously going upto 5 metres wide. Then it would have been at least several metres high, perhaps even up to 12-15 metres high, and then it was probably about 2.5 kilometres all the way around. And so we are talking about a very big wall. Remember, this wall needs to be big enough to keep out the enemy, with their huge armies.

But not only did they have to rebuild the walls, they also had to build new gates so that people could get in and out of the city. Again we are not talking about your typical backyard gate. We are talking about massive and strongly fortified gates, but they aren't just building once or two of these gates – they have to build 10 of them. As you read Nehemiah chapter 3, you see that this chapter is built around the rebuilding of the gates, and the walls in between – the chapter goes from gate to gate all the way around the walls. Gates such as The Sheep Gate, The Fish Gate, The Jeshanah Gate, The Valley Gate, and so on. 10 gates, all connected by a strong, hopefully impenetrable, wall.

This certainly is a big task, especially when you remember that they don't have the tools that we do today – so everything had to be done manually... brick by brick.

- **“Many hands make light work”**

Well if we were in a physical Church, I would probably get you to put your hands up if you have ever moved houses, but since we are over Zoom, I will just assume that most of us, if not all, have had to move houses sometime in our lives. I must admit that I hate moving houses. It is always such a big job as you pack up all your things in your old house, pack it into a truck, vehicles, or multiple trailers, and then move them to the new house, where you then have to unload everything and, move them inside, and then go about the slow process of unpacking and setting up the new house. It is always a big task, and I don't find fun in it at all.

However, when it comes doing something really big, such as moving houses, there is a saying that goes around which I believe can be quite true. The saying is, "Many hands make light work."

The idea being that, if one person were to work on a big task, such as moving house, building a car, painting the Sydney harbour bridge etc, then it would take them forever to accomplish the task if they were to do it by themselves, and that is if they are even capable of completing it themselves anyway. However, when you get more people involved, then suddenly the work becomes so much easier, and is done much more quickly and efficiently.

If Nehemiah had of tried to complete this task himself, can you imagine how slowly the work would happen? In fact, there would be parts of this job that would be completely impossible for him to do himself, for example, fixing all the doors in place.

And so, what we read in Nehemiah chapter 3 is that the whole community got together to make this work.

Verse 1 says, "Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate."

Verse 2, "The men of Jericho built the adjoining section, and Zaccur son of Imri built next to them."

And so on it goes.

All throughout Chapter 3, we see is a big list of names of those whom contributed towards the work of rebuilding the walls and all its 10 gates.

Now whilst we may try and skip over this passage due to it appearing boring, I want to challenge us that this passage can teach us a lot about what it means to be a part of a community, building together.

So let's look at Chapter 3 a bit closer, and see what this community looks like, as they work together.

### - **A Community Working together**

Years ago, I used to work in IT, and I remember on many occasions entering into businesses, or factories to do work on their computer system, and I remember some of the conversations I used to have with the workers there. Every now and then I used to hear the complaint from the workers about the management or office staff. I am sure many of you are familiar with their types of complaints. Often the factory workers felt like they weren't appreciated. They felt like management were being unrealistic, or putting too much pressure on them, and so they felt unvalued and sometimes abused.

But as I had these brief conversations, I found that their complains often follow with the phrase "we are the ones that do all the hard work", or "if it weren't for us, then they wouldn't have a job." You see... I often saw this sort of segregation between the factory workers, and the management and office staff.

Now I don't want to get into a discussion about how companies function, and how each person has an important role, but I want to highlight the point that sometimes, someone's role or status can cause an apparent segregation from those who are different to them.

But what is it we see happening in Nehemiah chapter 3, when it comes to rebuilding the wall? When it comes down to doing the tough dirty work?

Well Chapter 3 opens in a way that shows that no such segregation exists here in this important task of rebuilding the wall. It proclaims all the way from verse 1 until the end of this chapter, that everyone was getting involved, no matter their formal role or community status. Verse 1 says, "Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate".

Do you see what is happening here? I don't know about you, but for me, I imagine the priests, and especially the high priest, wouldn't usually be involved in much of the dirty work of the society. They had very specific requirements that they had to adhere to in order to stay clean, so that they could fulfil their priestly functions. And so you wouldn't have expected to see their names listed here as people that were helping to rebuild the way... but here they are.... they are actually rolling up their sleeves, so to speak, and helping with this mammoth task to rebuild the wall. You see... there was a need and so they stepped up and helped.

Then verses 15-16 says this:

"The Fountain Gate was repaired by Shallun son of Kol-Hozeh, **ruler** of the district of Mizpah. He rebuilt it, roofing it over and putting its doors and bolts and bars in place. He also repaired the wall of the Pool of Siloam, by the King's Garden, as far as the steps going down from the City of David. <sup>16</sup> Beyond him, Nehemiah son of Azbuk, **ruler** of a half-district of Beth Zur, made repairs up to a point opposite the tombs of David, as far as the artificial pool and the House of the Heroes."

So not only were the priests and High Priest helping with the construction, we also see that rulers of various parts of the districts were also coming together to lend a hand.

Further, in Nehemiah chapter 3, in verse 12, it also says this, "Next to him Shallum son of Hallohesh, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, made repairs, **he and his daughters.**"

As we read this, it becomes apparent that there does not seem to be any segregation, in status, in role, in gender, in function, when it comes to doing the tough and dirty work. Everyone from all ranks seem to be doing this work, ranging from the lowly slaves or servants, men and women, all the way up to the rulers and priests.

You see... when it comes to being a part of God's community, there should be no issue of status, or superiority. Why? Because we are all counted as equal. Whilst some may have particular roles that we are called into by God, it doesn't mean I am any more important than you, and it doesn't give us any right to use that role or power to lord it over someone else. Because in the kingdom of God, we are all equal. And here, in Nehemiah, we see that equality happening – ALL were involved.

But then, it doesn't stop there. And perhaps we see something even more incredible, in verses 23 onwards.

Verse 23 says, "Beyond them, Benjamin and Hasshub made repairs in front of their house; and next to them, Azariah son of Maaseiah, the son of Ananiah, made repairs beside his house."

Then down to verses 28-29,

“Above the Horse Gate, the priests made repairs, each in front of his own house. Next to them, Zadok son of Immer made repairs opposite his house,” and so on it goes.

Finally, we have whole families working together to rebuild the wall.

I love the fact that many people stepped outside their front door and began to build right in front of their house. They took responsibility for what was there. If they didn't rebuild the wall out the front of their house, then they risk it not being completed, and that would be where the enemy first comes in; they would be the first to be killed. And so they stepped up, and they built. So good.

Now of course, within the large community that was the Israelites, there were some very gifted people called to work on the walls. We read this in verse 31, “Next to him, Malkijah, one of the goldsmiths, made repairs.”

Now the ideal scenario would have been that the Israelites had enough skilled labourers and stone masons, carpenters, to rebuild the wall all by themselves. And can you imagine what the walls and gates would be like if they were these skilled labourers. They wall would be huge, it would be solid, and it would be made out of the strongest and best materials that were available to them, making surrounding nations scared about the presence of this great impenetrable wall.

However, when we turn to Chapter 4, the reality of the lack of skilled labourers becomes obvious to the surrounding nations. In verse 3, Tobiah, the Ammonite looks at the wall, and says, “What they are building—if even a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones!”

The wall was far from perfect. From the outside it didn't look like a strong impenetrable wall. Instead, it looked like a dodgy, unstable wall that would easily be broken through in a battle, or as Tobiah says, it could fall if a fox simply climbed on it.

But as we look at this passage, and the way that they all came together as builders, skilled or not, as they put aside their traditional roles, as they ignored their gender, and as they even worked out front of their own houses as a family, side by side, working together, whether they were gifted or not that was important – what was important was that they were working together as a community – together they became builders - and God used their willingness for his purposes.

In fact, I find it encouraging to read that there were people who had skills and experience in building, working alongside those that weren't skilled or had experience. Now it doesn't give any indication as to how the building actually took place with so many potentially unskilled people, but I can imagine those skilled people coming alongside the unskilled, and helping them out – encouraging them, guiding them. That together they were helping one another, and dividing the work up as best as possible given the available people.

But as we look at this passage, I think there are a few important things that we need to be challenged by:

### **1) Be builders; not consumers**

Firstly, this whole passage encourages us to be builders; not consumers.

When we look around at the various ministries within our Churches, we have a lot of things going on, and many great things might be happening. But the more we look at the ministries, and the more we look at society in general, the more we realise that often people are not builders, but rather, are consumers.

We come to Church for a service that suits us. We want the music to be the sorts of songs that we want, we want the message to be talking about things that we are interested in and not too challenging, we want a morning tea or supper that is filled of the things that we want, we want all these programs that suit our particular likes and are convenient for us... it is all about what we want. As we participate in these programs, we are consumers. Now, getting involved and attending our services, and going along to our various events isn't a bad thing, and in fact we encourage you to get involved in the activities of this Church, but it becomes bad if all we ever do is consume. It is bad if our participation in this Church, and even in society, is all about me getting things out of the activities, rather than me seeing to build and contribute.

You see... many of the Israelites could have easily said, "No, I'm not a builder, so I will leave it to someone else to do," but then they expect to reap the benefit of the work of others. That is being a consumer. But instead, they made a deliberate decision, in amidst of the pain that they were in as a defeated people, they chose to rise up and become builders. They stepped out of their comfort zone, they looked past their gifts and abilities, and their gender and their status, and chose to do something to contribute.

I have actually heard of several churches who make involvement in their community such a priority that they write it into the requirements for Church membership. They state that if you want to be a member in their church, then you need to commit to 3 things. They ask that you commit to coming to one service each week, that you are actively involved in one small group, or Bible study group, as well as in the leadership of one ministry. So not just taking part in ministry, so bringing your child along to youth group or playtime, but actually involved in the running of a ministry. Now whilst the difficulty of this is that it can easily become legalistic, I think that it is a great challenge and puts great priority upon in everyone contributing to the life of the Church. It encourages each person to be a builder.

And so the challenge is, will you be a builder? If this Church is going to move forward, if we are going to serve one another, if we are going to reach out to our community, then each and every single one of us must learn to be a builder.

So often we can sit back in our seats when someone is asking for help with something, and we can think to ourselves, "This isn't my gifting" or "I can't do that", and so we can easily dismiss it. Whilst of course we do need to determine where our giftings are, and minister accordingly, sometimes we are called to just 'get our hands dirty' so to speak, whether we feel we are gifted in that or not.

Choose to be a builder.

## **2) Come alongside one another**

Secondly, we need to think through, how are we coming alongside one another.

I remember when I was studying Computer Science at Uni. One of our subjects involved us working in groups on a specific project. I was one of the ones who was lucky enough to work on a project for a real company, rather than a fictitious company. As a team, we needed to find out what sort of computer software they wanted us to design, and then we were to then work on fulfilling that request. Whilst we all took on various tasks relating to our abilities, a part of the assignment required that each of us was involved in actually writing the code for part of the computer software.

Now... unfortunately this didn't all go to plan. Whilst we worked really well initially, there became some issues later on where our lead programmer seemed to drop off the face of this earth. No matter how many

times we tried to get in contact with him, our attempts always proved unsuccessful. Time started getting away from us, and we had no idea whether he had been working on the project or not. To cut a long story short, when we finally met with him and our two lecturers, and our lecturers asked him what was going on, his response was that he just wanted to work on it himself. You see... whilst he was a talented programmer, he had missed the point of team work – that we all needed to be involved in it, and we had skills and abilities that could help.

You can just imagine the scene in Jerusalem as they are all building the walls and gates. One man is there, with his family, working on the wall outside his own house, and they all turn to look to the right, and there they see their neighbours all working together on the wall outside their house, and then their neighbours next to them, and the same to the left of them too. You see... as we work together, we automatically encourage one another, and it makes it so much easier to keep the common purpose in mind.

So some alongside people, and work together and encourage them. Build one another up.

### **3) Realise there will be opposition**

Finally, if we are to be builders; if we are to do the work that God calls us to do, then we must realise that there will be opposition. As you go home and read over this passage again, look at the opposition that comes at the beginning of chapter 4. The leaders of the surrounding enemy nations were angry that they were rebuilding the wall. They hurled insults at them and mocked them.

And you know... if we all step up and choose to be builders, and contribute towards the work of God in this Church and into our community, then we too will see opposition. Satan wants you to be a consumer. Satan doesn't want you to step up and to contribute towards God's vision of seeking and saving the lost. Satan doesn't want our Church to be a healthy thriving Church where people are coming to faith. And so when we step up and build, and contribute, and support one another, Satan will do everything he can to knock us down. But let's stand firm, and keep putting one foot in front of another, or like our guide said on our climb of mount Kinabalu, "Slowly slowly." Together, we can move forward.

I don't know about you, but to me the rebuilding of this wall, with its 10 different gates, sounds like a massive job. Sometimes I can start huge jobs, and I look at the work I have done, and then think about all the work that still needs to be done, and I can easily get discouraged and wonder why I am putting in all this effort in the first place. And so, when I look at the rebuilding of this wall, I can just imagine what might have been going through their minds as they started the job. But there is one key that this passage reveals to us that allowed them to persevere, which I want to leave with you now.

It is found in Nehemiah 4:6, which says, "So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart."

You see, they all had a common purpose. They all knew that they were working towards what God was doing to rebuild them as a nation, and restore their identity, and they knew that rebuilding the walls was essential to that plan. And so, with the clear common purpose in mind, this helped them to continue on and persevere until it was completed.

They all became builders. Will you be a builder too?

**PRAY**