



“To the Work”
Nehemiah 2:9-20

Idea: There is a time to pray, a time to prepare, and a time to work.

Intro: Mike Singletary is one of the NFL’s all-time great middle linebackers. He was a phenomenal player in every facet of the game. His story began as a freshman at Worthing High School in Houston, Texas, earning all-state honors as both a guard and linebacker. Coach Grant Teaff recognized Singletary’s talent and offered him a scholarship to play at Baylor University. There he lettered all four years of his college career. He is arguably the greatest defensive player in the history of Baylor football. He recorded 97 tackles as a freshman, 232 as a sophomore, 188 as a junior, and 145 as a senior. He was a two-time winner of the SWC Player of the Year award. He was a two-time consensus All-American (79-80). And he was a two-time recipient of the Davy O’Brien Memorial Trophy.

In 1981 the Chicago Bears drafted Singletary in in the second round as the #38 pick. He became a starter in the seventh game of his rookie year and was later named to the all-rookie team.

Over his impressive twelve year NFL career, Singletary amassed 1,488 tackles, 7 interceptions, 12 fumble recoveries, and only missed 2 games. He was a three-time NFC Player of the Year, a two-time NFL Defensive Player of the Year, a ten-time pro-bowler, the 1990 NFL Man of the Year, and Super Bowl XX champion.

He was known as Samurai Mike and the Minister of Defense because he could make tackles anywhere along the gridiron. It didn't matter who was running the football or where he was on the field; somehow Singletary knew where that ball was going to be, and he often got there in time to stop the play.

One time after a game, a CBS reporter asked, "How do you get clobbered by a couple of linemen on one side of the field, then a few seconds later you make a tackle on the other side?"

Singletary replied, "I get up."

He understood the necessity of getting back up and going to the work.

Inquiry: Working through the Book of Nehemiah, we have learned that Jerusalem was down. Its walls were broken and destroyed. Many of the people who had returned with Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel, and Ezra had left to live in the countryside. The people were discouraged, the poor were suffering from high taxes, the Persians were taking revenue, and the neighboring groups were dominating in commerce and politics.

Nehemiah was the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes, and he was in Susa when Hanani reported to him the desperate and shameful state of Jerusalem and its people. Upon hearing that report, Nehemiah immediately began to pray and seek God. He prayed for four months, while waiting for an opportunity to approach the king. During those four months of prayer, Nehemiah also prepared.

Nehemiah believed God would act and be gracious toward the Jewish people in accordance with His word. So he persistently and patiently prayed for God to move. His faith also led him to make preparations so that when God did move, he would be ready. Finally, the time came for action. The opportunity to address the king presented itself (2:2-8), and Nehemiah shared the need with Artaxerxes. Then, shortly after that, he was on his way to Jerusalem.

Read Nehemiah 2:9-20.

Nehemiah was a man of prayer, but he was also a man of action. His story reveals to us that there is a time to pray, a time to prepare, and a time to work. For Nehemiah and the Jews in Jerusalem the time for them to get to the work had come.

Here we find a lesson that the church today desperately needs to hear. How many times do we see a need but never take action? How many times do we pray but never take action? How many times do we make preparations, but for whatever reason, they are never put into action? There comes a time when we have to not just talk but also act.

In all toil there is profit, but mere talk tends only to poverty.
– Proverbs 14:23

Nehemiah moved past talking and preparation to action, and he, likewise, moved the Jews past talking and preparation to action. This wise and strong leader understood what was necessary to inspire people to the work. We find four of these necessities in this passage.

1. See the Need (vs. 12-15)

Nehemiah had heard Hanani's report. It is what inspired him to pray and plan for four months in preparation of speaking to the king. His eyes, though, had not yet seen the shameful state of Jerusalem and its

people. I can only imagine how gut wrenching of a sight it must have been for him as he approached the ruins of what was once the greatest city in the world.

After a three-day rest, it was time for the new leader to see with his eyes the great need. Nehemiah records how he went out by the cover of night to inspect the walls and gates of the city but told no one where he was or what he was doing. He saw with his own eyes that they were truly broken down and burned with fire.

The city of David, the city of the King, lay in shambles. The city that represented the nation, which God had built, lay in shame. Nehemiah saw that the walls and gates of Jerusalem had to be rebuilt not simply to defend the city's fortifications or improve its economy, but to exalt God's Name. The glory of God was at stake in the enterprise, not simply Jerusalem's welfare. Seeing the need inspired he and the people to the work.

2. Catch the Vision (vs. 17-18)

We don't know who the audience was in these verses. We're not sure if he called a large assembly of the citizenry or gathered together only the rulers? It does seem though, that at some point he spoke to everyone. What we do know is that Nehemiah appealed to their national and spiritual heritage. The critical issues were not safety and security but honor and respect. The shambles of Jerusalem reflected badly upon their religious faith.

Nehemiah also laid out the plan to reverse their shameful state. "Come let us build the wall of Jerusalem." The way to exalt the name of God among the pagan peoples was to rebuild the walls. In addition to the plan, he told them all that God had been doing for the last several months. He shared the need and showed how the Lord was already working to meet the

need. As a result the people caught the vision. They responded, “Let us rise up and build.”

3. Expect some Opposition (vs. 10, 19)

When Nehemiah stopped in the lands outside of Judah to present his papers to the officials in order to gain safe passage, the nature of his arrival created some immediate problems. The Bible tells us Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant were greatly displeased at the news. Sanballat was the governor of Samaria. It is unclear what position Tobiah held. Most likely these men saw Nehemiah as a threat to their power.

As the Jews moved toward the work of rebuilding the walls and gates, the number of their opponents increased. Sanballat and Tobiah were joined by Geshem the Arab. Geshem was not a Persian official like the others; he was the king of Qedar, an extensive area stretching from northern Arabia to the borders of Egypt. Perhaps he joined the mocking and ridiculing because he didn't like having a new player on the political field.

As Nehemiah entered Jerusalem and started the process of rebuilding the walls, he expected to experience some level of opposition. He knew that the other officials were not happy about his arrival. He knew that even within the community of Jews there would be different levels of buy-in. Some might even work against him. He understood his job. He was clear on the objective. And he recognized that it wasn't just about rebuilding walls and gates. There was a spiritual component to it, so he expected some level of opposition.

Most work for God thrusts you into the arena of conflict. The enemy is always on the alert, ready to destroy any undertaking, which might glorify God and

help others.

4. Rest in God's Provision (vs. 20)

In the face of opposition and doubt, Nehemiah faithed into God. He believed and trusted in God. He rested in God's provision; boldly declaring that God would cause them to prosper. And he told his mockers that they had no portion, right, or claim in Jerusalem. He was confident that God would cause them to be successful. He would provide what they needed and protect them from their opposition.

Sanballat, Tobiah, and Gehsem tried to discourage and frighten the Jews by accusing them of rebelling against the king. That same accusation had caused King Artaxerxes to stop Ezra's reconstruction of Jerusalem a few years earlier. It wouldn't work this time because Nehemiah was confident that God was in control of the Persian king. He rested in the provision of God.

We see in this passage four necessities to inspire people to the work. What is the application for us? How do these four necessities apply to us today? I believe they are applicable in every part of our lives, families, and church. Every time the Lord moves us to do something, He shows us the need, shares the vision, reminds us of opposition, and calls us to rest in His provision. A very relevant portrayal of this can be seen as we consider the upcoming renovation of our facilities. Now, let me make clear that my goal by preaching through Nehemiah is not to use it to prop up or validate the renovation. God led me to preach through Judges and Nehemiah over a year ago in order to address the natural tendency of man to do things his way rather than God's way. In Judges we see a people who are fearful and faithless. In Nehemiah we find a people who begin to be fearless and faithful.

As we consider the huge undertaking of renovating our worship center, senior adult classes, and church office, we must

embrace these necessary components of inspiration. We can't and won't say like the Jews, "Let us rise up and build" without them. Therefore, let's take a look at these components.

Why renovate? What is the need?

Last September I shared with you that NAMB estimates that 75% of North America is outside a saving relationship with Jesus. That means there are approximately 22,500 lost and unchurched people living in Powhatan. Jesus has commanded us to go and reach our Jerusalem with the gospel. And He has given us the tools to reach them. One of those tools is our church campus. In our culture, the church building is still a very effective tool. As we are sharing our faith with people in the community and inviting them to worship with us in order to hear more about Jesus, we want them to have a great experience at church. Therefore, as a church it is imperative that we constantly keep our facilities current and clean. Remember, the campus is a tool, and tools can become dull and ineffective. When an axe becomes dull it no longer cuts effectively. You can swing the axe harder, but you will get better results if you sharpen the axe.

If the iron is blunt, and one does not sharpen the edge, he must use more strength, but wisdom helps one to succeed.

– Eccl 10:10

We have renovated our children's space and updated our parking lot. By renovating our worship center and senior adult classes, we are further sharpening this tool so we can be more effective in reaching our community for Christ. Is this tool good enough for us? Sure, in many ways it is because we've been here a long time, but we're not talking about us. The mission is to reach our Jerusalem. The job is huge, so we better sharpen our tools.

What is the vision? What do we need to do?

Look around you. What do you see? I see a good facility, but it is not great. It is strong but not sharp. When this building was rebuilt after the fire in 1984, it was current and beautiful.

Today, thirty plus years later, it is out of date and shows her age. Over the last three decades the approach to ministry has changed greatly. Technology has changed. Architectural design has changed. There is also the need for senior adults to be on the main level since we don't have an elevator. In order for our seniors to be on the main level, our church office will have to move. Therefore, in this renovation we are going to update our worship center and foyer, relocate all senior adult small groups to the main floor, and build a new office building.

Who will oppose it?

As we understand the need and catch the vision for renovating our facilities, we must remember that there will be some level of opposition. Even right now, I'm sure there are some saying to themselves, "We don't need that. The building is fine just as it is." There are others who are saying, "We can't afford to renovate. We're a small church."

For us the opposition will most likely come from within rather than from outside the church. This is why I have been talking about the need for nearly two-and-half years. I want you to see the need and catch the vision. I want you to begin to believe God for what may seem impossible. And as you begin to believe God in this endeavor, the Enemy will attempt to cast doubt in your heart. The renovation will require all of us to sacrifice a great deal. It will require that we all give above and beyond the normal tithe. So the enemy will, and maybe already is, telling you that you can't give.

How can we rest in God's provision?

We must believe that with God nothing is impossible. That is what the Jews did when they caught the vision from Nehemiah. Everything and everyone was against them, but the Jews declared, "Let us rise up and build."

If God has put this vision in our hearts, He will see it through. He will provide the resources. Yes, He will provide them through us. If we are willing to trust Him, He will do the miraculous. I believe God is going to teach us through this

project how to better trust Him. Right now, there are dozens of families in our church who don't trust God. There's no way they can trust God to provide for them to give above and beyond the tithe because they don't trust God enough to give the tithe on a weekly basis. I've asked our finance department for some numbers on giving because I want to know what our income looks like. Now, I never see the amounts people give. What I learned this past week is that for this current budget year, nearly five months, over 40% of our contributors gave \$500 or less. The percentage could be as high as 57%. What does that number tell us? It reveals that a high percentage of our people don't tithe. They may give, but they aren't tithing. They're not obedient in this crucial area of their spiritual lives. Church, I want you to experience all that God has for you, but you cannot and will not experience it until you become obedient and faithful. Every one of us can and should rest in the provision of God. And it ought to start today.

Conclusion: The story of Nehemiah is the story of resolution and direction because it is a story of living for the purposes of God. After Nehemiah had surveyed the wall and determined the repairs needed, he gathered the people. "Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision," he told them. For years the people of Judah had languished, overwhelmed by foreign domination, uncertain about what to do next. Nehemiah arrived with a clear goal in view, one that fit the greater designs of God. As a result, the people replied, "Let us rise up and build," and they went to the work.

We must do the same. We must dare to survey the conditions around us not with the intent of criticizing but with the resolve to rebuild. We must rebuild our walls of stewardship. We must rebuild our walls of evangelism. We must rebuild our walls of the church.

Let's stand to sing and declare our dependence upon God. Let's call upon His name. Today, if you are not resting in god's provision, confess it and begin trusting right now.