



“To the Work”

Part II

Nehemiah 2:9-20

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

Intro: Why daddy? The parents in the room have heard that question a time or two. I hear the question quite often because I spend a lot of time around children and families with young children, whether it’s my own home, the park, the library, the elementary school, or at church. Kids like to ask questions. They want to understand the reason and meaning behind things. It really doesn’t change that much as one grows older. What, why, and how are questions for which we are constantly seeking answers. We ask these questions in the church. Just before our Lord ascended into heaven He answered those three questions when He gave the church its marching orders.

18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them

to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." – Matt 28:18-20

8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." – Acts 1:8

Did you catch the what, why, and how? Jesus tells the church what they are to do, why they are to do it, and how they are to do it. In these Great Commission passages Jesus calls us to be a church that intentionally, strategically, creatively, and urgently takes the gospel to our neighbors and to the nations. He calls to the work...to join Him in the work.

Inquiry: Nehemiah's story was very much the same. Jerusalem lay in ruins. 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 all the 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 and 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.

During his time of prayer and fasting, God answered Nehemiah's questions of what, why, and how. He saw the need, understood why he must act, and knew how it would be accomplished. When Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem he did for the Jews what God had done for him. He answered the what, why, and how questions they were asking. In doing so he helped inspire the Jews to the work. He helped them:

1. See the Need (vs. 12-15, 17)

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. 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. It was important that he see with his own eyes the broken down walls and burned gates. In doing so the reality of the city of David, the city of the King, lying in shambles gripped Nehemiah's heart. He 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. The Jews in Jerusalem saw the shame too. Nehemiah and the people were inspired to the work because they could see the need.

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

When Nehemiah spoke to the people he 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.

He 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)

There was no shortage of opposition against Nehemiah and the Jews in Jerusalem. Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem mocked, ridiculed, and accused them of rebellion. They remind us that 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.

Nehemiah answered the what, why, and how questions the Jews were asking. These four facets of inspiration are always true. When God calls you to the work to take action, it is imperative that you see the need, catch the vision, expect some opposition, and rest in God’s provision.

Last Sunday, I applied these four facets to our upcoming renovation project. I talked a little bit about the *what*. What are we seeking to do in the renovation? We are going to update our worship center, foyer, senior adult small group space, and construct a new office building. In November the church affirmed and tasked a seven-member renovation team with the responsibility of researching, developing, and proposing a plan to the church. I want you to know that the team has contracted with Church Interiors, a church renovation and remodeling company, to do a study and develop a plan for the renovation. The Church Interiors representatives were here on January 15th and 23rd. The team shared our needs and desires with those reps, and they will come back to us in mid-February with plans and an itemized cost report.

A project of this size will require a strategic funding plan, so the team will meet with representatives from Impact Stewardship on February 26th. This firm will help us develop a comprehensive program, articulate the vision, and walk with us throughout the stewardship campaign.

The team will bring plans and proposals before the church for discussion and affirmation in the next few months. There will be many opportunities during that time to view and discuss the proposal.

Last week, I also talked a little bit about the *why*. Our community is becoming more and more lost and unchurched. We have a gospel mandate to reach those people. Where God guides, He always provides. He gives us the tools we need for the job. 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 learn more about Jesus, we want them to have a great experience with the church. The Sunday morning worship service is the front door of our church. The worship center has had very few upgrades over the last 30 years, so it is time to update it. We need to bring the room into the 21st century. This is a tool for us to use;

therefore, 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. We also need to make a way for our seniors to be on the main level of our building and to have a dedicated safe space for our children.

What about the *how*? How are we going to fund this project?

First and foremost, we are going to rest in God's provision.

We serve the One, True, Living God who is inexhaustible and who owns everything. He is the One who not only gives us life eternal but also gives us everything we need in this life today.

As we rest in God's provision, we will have a three-year capital stewardship campaign, whereby we will ask our members and regular attenders to give sacrificially above and beyond the tithe to fund the renovation. We will spend several weeks teaching on biblical stewardship, allowing the Word of God to speak and develop our faith. And then we will have a first fruits offering that will kick-off the campaign.

I fully understand that any discussion of money makes some people in the church anxious. Those folks would prefer to not hear about tithing much less a capital campaign above and beyond the tithe. I understand; it's not my favorite subject either because it makes people so uncomfortable. But God has not tasked me, as a Bible preacher, to ensure your comfort. He has tasked me with calling you to holiness and obedience.

The truth is, if every believer was obedient in the area of biblical stewardship, we would never need a capital campaign. But since a significant percentage of our givers do not tithe, we don't have that luxury. What keeps believers from being obedient in this area? I believe there are two reasons. First, they are stingy, and think the money is theirs. Or second, they lack faith and don't trust God to take care of them. God speaks to both of these issues. The Bible makes it vividly clear that God owns it all, and that we are stewards who manage His

property. The Bible also states that God will supply every need of yours when you trust Him in your giving (Phil 4:19).

I know that some of you are struggling with this. I talked with some of you this past week. Let me say that you have to start somewhere, and the place to begin is with the Word of God.

Last week, I was struggling with this subject. I had had conversations with some of our members about stewardship and the difficulties they were having financially. My heart hurt for them. I felt compassion and empathy for their situation. In fact I found myself rationalizing their situations and flirting with the thought of telling them that because of their struggles, it was okay to give what they could. Then I remembered what God has said in His Word.

Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. – Mal 3:10a

As a follower of Christ, you must always begin with the Word of God. It and it alone is authoritative over your life. God has spoken and given you promise after promise of how He will supply your every need. So, as you seek to rest in God's provision let me share with you a few things to keep in mind.

When God has spoken, presented the need, and made His will known...

You don't:

- **Trust in yourself.**
When God met Moses on the mountainside and told him to go back to Egypt, his first response was to ask, "Who am I?" (Ex 3:11)

Moses rightly recognized his finiteness, his limitation, and that he was in control of nothing, but that reality crippled his faith.

- **Trust in your abilities.**

Moses doubted his abilities to speak, lead, and persuade. He declared his weakness (Ex 4:1, 10). He crippled his faith by looking at his inabilities.

- **Trust in your possessions.**
Moses held a staff in his hand. As he listened to God's call upon his life, he began to recognize that what he possessed was not enough for the job; it was exhaustible (Ex 4:2). The limited resources he held crippled his faith.

When God has spoken, presented the need, and made His will known...

You do:

- **Trust in God.**
He is good, faithful, and full of love.
In the face of Moses' fear and doubt, God assured him that He would be a constant presence throughout the journey (Ex 3:12). When God has made His will known, we have to get our eyes off of ourselves and onto Him.
- **Trust in God's Word.**
He has given us promise after promise, and His Word never returns void. God reminded Moses that He was the God who had called and spoken to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex 3:16). He also promised to bring them out of bondage and into the Promise Land (Ex 3:17). When God has spoken, we have to get our eyes off of ourselves and onto Him.
- **Trust in God's power.**
He split the Red Sea, gave water from a rock, fed millions with manna from heaven, and caused the Persian king to fund the rebuilding of Jerusalem. God reminded Moses of His power by turning his staff into a snake and causing his hand to become leprous (Ex 4:3,

6-7). When God has made His power known, we have to get our eyes off of ourselves and onto Him.

Conclusion: This past week I heard Dr. David Jeremiah share an amazing story of God's faithfulness to those who rest in God's provision. The story goes back to the early days of Dallas Theological Seminary. The school was founded in 1924, and in the beginning years it almost closed because of financial problems. They didn't have any money. During that period, every day was trusting God for twenty-four hours. The seminary came to the point of bankruptcy, and all the creditors were ready to foreclose at noon on a particular day. That morning the founders of the school met together in the president's office to pray that God would provide. In the prayer meeting, there was a Bible teacher named H. A. Ironside who was on the board. He was a wonderful theologian and writer. When it was his turn to pray, he prayed, "Lord, we know that the cattle on a thousand hills are Thine. Please sell some of them and send us the money."

Just about noon that day, when the meeting was still going on, a tall Texan in boots and an open-collar shirt strolled in the seminary's business office. "Howdy," he said to the office secretary. "I just sold two car loads of cattle over in Fort Worth, and I have been trying to make a business deal go through, but it just won't work. And I feel like God wants me to give this money to the seminary. I don't know if you need it or not, but here is the check." He handed the check over to the secretary. The sweet lady took the check, and knowing the urgency of the moment, she went to the door of the prayer meeting and knocked. Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, the founder and president of the school, answered the door and took the check from her hand. The check was for the exact amount of their debt. He recognized the name of the cattleman on the check, so he knew it was the cattleman's check. Then, he turned to Dr. Ironside and said, "Harry, God sold the cattle!"

Isn't that a great story? I could go on and tell you story after story of how God has provided for His children, His church,

missionaries on the field, and my family. Stories like that are exciting and encouraging. We love to hear them, but most of the time they don't generate the type of response from us that should be generated. Our response is usually, "Does God do that for me? Will He do that for me?"

Yes, God will do that for you. If He will do it one person, He will do it for every person. God is faithful to His Word.

10 Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. 11 I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the Lord of hosts. 12 Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the Lord of hosts. – Mal 3:10-12

That is what the Bible says. That is what God has said. As we see the need and catch the vision, while understanding that there will be some level of opposition, we must rest in God's provision. We must take Him at His Word. If you can't trust Him with your finances, what makes you think you can trust Him with your salvation?