



“The Good Work”
Nehemiah 3

Idea: In the work of God, the greatest accomplishments come from unity of purpose when people of diverse backgrounds, interests, and abilities join together under a compelling vision. Success is achieved not because we are all the same but because our differences are put aside to work for a greater goal.

Intro: What dominates your conversation after church on Sundays? What have you thought about or noticed people talking about after church? It is usually something like this:

“The pastor preached a good sermon today,” or “I can’t believe the pastor talked about money this morning,” or “I wonder why Mrs. So & So wore that dress again,” or better, “I really felt like I worshiped the Lord today.”

God’s review of our Sunday service, I think would be much different. He would probably say something like this:

“The nursery was led by Carolyn and Dee, and Tiffany stayed to help them care for the three new babies who were guests this morning. Jennifer led the children’s

area with Stephanie, Chris, Jonathan, Gloria, Heidi, Pat, and Crystal teaching in the different classes. The greeters were Clyde, Ruthie, Rick, Josh, and Jeanette. And they each had a smile on their face as they made everyone feel welcome. Nick led the students with Holly, Jeff, Wendy, Jack, Karen, Heather, and Tim teaching the classes. Tommy, Nancy, Shields, Mark, Jean, and Belle came to church prepared to teach and to bless those in their adult classes. Each member of the worship team did an outstanding job focusing on my glory and leading the congregation to see My greatness.”

You get the point. God knows how vital every role is, and He notices what everyone is doing. It was the same when Nehemiah and the people of Judah rebuilt the walls and gates in Jerusalem.

Read Nehemiah 3:1-2, 28-32.

Inquiry: In chapters 1-2 we saw that Nehemiah, at the height of power and influence in Persia, was a student of Scripture who interpreted life in light of the Bible, prayed for God to accomplish the purposes He laid out in the Bible, and took action to do what he could to be used of the Lord in answer to his own prayers. The good hand of God was on Nehemiah, so this servant traveled to Jerusalem and called the Jews to rise up and rebuild the gates and walls of the city.

Chapter 3 shows the people’s response to Nehemiah’s call to action in 2:17-18. The chapter is organized around the rebuilding of the gates, and the references to those who worked next to those rebuilding gates account for the people who rebuilt the walls between the gates.

We see in Nehemiah a model of valor, and this valor exemplified by him is a forward-looking Christlikeness. Nehemiah was a student of the Scriptures, a prayer warrior, one who loved God and His people, who sought the good of God’s

people at great risk to himself, who showed great courage and boldness protecting God's people and trusting God, and who lived for the high cause of God's kingdom. Christians today ought to follow in Nehemiah's footsteps on the valiant path of Christlikeness studying the Bible, praying, protecting others, and laying themselves down in the good work of service to God.

Our service to God is a good work. In fact it is a glorious work because we get to serve the good and glorious King. It is also good and glorious because of how God brings together different people to achieve a single goal. In the work of God, the greatest accomplishments come from unity of purpose when people of diverse backgrounds, interests, and abilities join together under a compelling vision. Success, then, is achieved not because we are all the same but because our differences are put aside to work for a greater goal.

Nehemiah 3 shows us what this good work looks like. In it we discover six truths.

1. The good work of God is accomplished when God's people serve together.

This reconstruction project was huge. It required wood, stone, mortar, bolts, bars, tools, and much labor. As we will learn in chapter 4, it also required armed guards for protection. There was no way Nehemiah could have rebuilt the walls and restore the gates himself, and he definitely could not have finished the work in fifty-two days. The work was too great. However, by sharing the need, casting the vision, and calling the people to join him in the good work, Nehemiah was able to see the project completed in record time.

Chapter 3 begins with Eliashib the high priest and his priestly brothers rising up to rebuild the Sheep Gate. Nehemiah shows us that the most important person in the city worked to rebuild the gate next to the most

important building in the city, the temple. Eliashib collaborated with Jews from all walks of life. Priests, farmers, goldsmiths, perfume-makers, residents of Jerusalem, residents of surrounding towns, noble leaders, and commoners all came together to do the work. The beauty of their unity is found in the refrain, *and next to him...next to them...next to him.*”

The rebuilt wall was a testimony to the workers’ interdependent partnership. They served together, following the example of the high priest. In the church today we serve together in the same way.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. – 1 Cor 12:12

Jesus is our High Priest, and we, as His disciples serving together, make up His body. The work of the gospel is a work in which we co-labor. Each of us has our own individual responsibilities, but those responsibilities work together to bring to completion the whole. There is no lone ranger Christians. The work of discipleship is not relegated to pastors and small group leaders. It is a work we all are to do. And when we serve together, the good work is accomplished.

2. The good work of God requires organization.

In addition to being an inspiring leader, Nehemiah was also a gifted administrator. He included seven detailed lists of names, locations, and responsibilities interspersed throughout this book. He understood the importance and value of accurate records. These lists are not dull recitals of forgotten names; they preserve the story of heroic people who played their part in the community of faith. They reveal how different people from different walks of life joined together for a

common purpose. They teach us that every good work requires good organization.

Perhaps the greatest challenge in leadership is keeping everyone together and working toward a common goal. This requires organization. People naturally default to doing what is right in his or her eyes. Each group and person must know his or her job and work together toward the goal.

Appl: No one person can do all the work. That is why we have greeters in the parking lot and doors, helpers at the children's check-in, ushers, singers, small group leaders, care group leaders, and secretaries to take attendance. We organize and work together to ensure that people feel welcome and comfortable so that they can hear the Word of God taught and be transformed.

3. The good work of God is hard work.

Anyone who thinks the service of the Lord isn't hard work hasn't served the Lord very long. Rebuilding the wall was hard work. They laid stone, raised timbers, and mixed mortar. If you've ever poured a foundation, laid block, or laid brick, you know it is backbreaking work.

In much the same way, the good work of God in the church is backbreaking work. It is inconvenient work. Sometimes it means you're giving money to the single mom who lost her job, making dinner for a family who had a baby, praying long hours for a marriage that's on the rocks, studying and preparing weekly to teach in your small group, sweating in the kitchen to get lunch ready for the family who just buried their dad, and meeting over coffee to share the gospel with a person whose child is in your kid's 4th grade class.

The good work of God is hard work.

4. The good work of God is selfless work.

That this list should start at the Sheep Gate is markedly symbolic. It is saying, “Put God first, others second, and yourself last.” The good work of rebuilding the walls and gates required the Jews to sacrifice. They sacrificed their time, energy, and resources. It cost them a lot to restore the city. The work even jeopardized their security, but none of that mattered. Volunteers came from Jericho, Tekoa, Gibeon, Mizpah, Zanoah, Beth Hakkerem, Beth Zur, Keilah, and Jerusalem. They gave themselves to the good work of God. They selflessly served God and one another.

Appl: Today, we selflessly serve the Lord and one another in the church. For example, our precious preschool leaders give themselves in service to our kids. They change diapers, wipe snotty noses, and build the Word of God in the hearts and minds of our children. They don’t do it for recognition. They aren’t looking for a pat on the back. They do it because they love Jesus. They do it because they love the children. And they do it because they love the church. Those should be the reasons why all of us serve. The good work is selfless work.

5. The good work of God is refused by some.

Read 3:5.

“Hard work spotlights the character of people; some turn up their sleeves, some turn up their noses, and some don’t turn up at all.” – Sam Ewing

Nehemiah includes in his list of workers the men of Tekoa, a town south of Jerusalem. However, their nobles would not stoop to serve the Lord. They were well aware of the need, but they resolutely refused to help. They wouldn’t dirty their hands with the work.

The phrase “*would not stoop*” suggests it was pride, and not laziness that kept them from the work.

Appl: There are many who refuse to participate in the good work of the church because they’re lazy. They are happy to take without giving back. There are also some who refuse to work because they think the work is beneath them. “I’m not changing diapers in the nursery.” “I’ve put in my time.” “I’m not wasting my Saturday to take lunch to homeless people or plant flowers.”

There is no one work in the church beneath any of us. That does not mean you should do every job. We learn from the apostles’ response to the physical needs of the Hellenistic Jewish widows in Acts 6 that ministering to their physical needs was not work they needed to do. Peter and the others were more than willing to roll up their sleeves and serve the widows, but that would require them to forsake their higher calling of preaching the Word of God. The better solution was to select other men to serve and to meet the widows’ needs.

Pride kept the nobles from helping rebuild the wall. They didn’t have time. They thought the work was beneath them. Their excuses are the same excuses people give today. Ultimately, they focused on themselves rather than putting their focus on the betterment of others.

6. The good work of God is recognized and rewarded.

The list of builders and the work they completed makes up the whole of this chapter and serves as a memoir for those who served to restore the city and remove its shame. Chapter 3 is presented as an overview of the work; the actual chronology of events resumes in chapter 4.

This list informs us that God recognizes and remembers what we do in life. It is similar to Jesus' address to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3. Jesus said to the church in Ephesus, "I know your works" (2:2). He said to the church in Smyrna, "I know your tribulation" (2:9). To the church in Pergamum He said, "I know where you dwell" (2:13). Then to the churches in Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea Jesus again said, "I know your works" (2:19; 3:1, 8, 15).

There is no doubt that nothing escapes the eyes of God. He sees your service. He recognizes how faithfully and selflessly you serve Him and others. There is also no doubt that God rewards those who serve Him.

7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

– 2 Timothy 4:7-8

God will reward our faithful service in heaven one day, but we don't have to wait till then to receive our reward. The Lord gives us a sliver of the reward on this side of heaven. For the Jews rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, one of their rewards was the recognition that they were building something, which they could dedicate to the glory of God. Another great reward came from working together harmoniously and leaving something behind which would outlive their days. The fact they were leaving a legacy was a great reward.

It is the same for us today. When we serve others, build the Word of God into people, and create ministries that bless we feel a sense of pride because it brings glory to God. It also gives us joy because what we have done will last long after we are gone. Those feelings of accomplishment are good gifts from God.

Conclusion: Today, the job before us is not to build a wall in Jerusalem but to help build God's eternal kingdom throughout the world. It is not about rebuilding Solomon's temple but about investing in individual lives that can become spiritual temples inhabited by the Spirit of God.

And there is good work for all of us.

There is a well-known description of football that states, "It's twenty-two men who desperately need a rest being watched by millions of people who desperately need exercise." Church life can often function the same way. Some people choose to sit and watch others build, just as some refused to participate in Nehemiah's project. They simply watch, and sometimes criticize those who serve. The story of the wall being rebuilt reminds us to pick up a trowel and join with men, women, boys, and girls to build Christ's church. This is a good work!