

ARISE

Work Begins, Opposition Comes
2.12.2023



THE JOURNEY
CHURCH

SCRIPTURE:

Nehemiah 3-4:13

SERMON:

Building up Drill Sergeants to be these other worldly men: You see, when I look back at being 18 years old, I had built up in my mind how incredible these Drill Sergeants were. I had made them these other worldly figures in my mind, which led me to believe that anyone's effort to come against them would be futile.

Why do I tell this story? Because I think you can relate to this. I believe we are all guilty, at some level, of doing this same thing with people in the Bible. When we read the Bible and we encounter the stories of the people in them we often see them as other worldly people. We read their stories and we almost view them to be these spiritual giants who were far different from us. But I want to challenge us to see them differently from that.

The Bible is filled with normal people who were willing to make their lives available to God. The Bible is the story of God's work in the world.

History is our ability in the present to look back and put the pieces together. In fact, we are still living in that story. God's story is still unfolding. And while we know how the story ends, we are living characters in the story. We are not the lead characters, in fact, we all play the role of supporting cast. Jesus is the lead character of the story. But we get to participate in the storyline that is all about him. That is, if we are willing. In fact, I want you to think about like this:

You are either giving your life to the story of God or trying to create a story for yourself.

We're jumping back into Nehemiah and looking at what it means to give your life to the story of God.

Exegesis: Nehemiah 3-4:13

Chapter 3 of Nehemiah contains the names of individuals and families who took position and began rebuilding the walls and the gates. They did not wait long after Nehemiah shared the vision to begin working.

In fact, they knew that the vision could never become reality if they did not all pitch in and do their part. One of the things that I love about this passage is that it is filled with names. These are the names of real people who walked this earth just as we do. These are people with families, with mouths to feed, with health issues, and everything we face. But their names are recorded in history for laboring to build the kingdom. They labored because they knew the glory of God was at stake.

Their names are recorded in this book, even though we don't know who they were. But it shows us something really important: the labors of God's servants in the world are recorded and known.

Revelation 20:12 -- *And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.*

Our works will not be the basis of eternal life, but they will be the basis of our rewards in eternal life. Remember, there is a judgment of faith and a judgment of work. The judgment of faith is about whether or not you trust Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then for Christians comes the judgment of works. We see a picture of this in Revelation 2-3 where Jesus is taking scores of the 7 churches. "These things you do well. This I have against you." Jesus says to Christians, ***"I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds"*** (Revelation 2:23).

"It is my happiness that I have served Him who never fails to reward His servants to the full extent of His promise." – John Calvin

"Consider, to provoke you to good works, that you shall have from God, when you come to glory, a reward for everything you do for him on earth. Whatever good thing you do for Him, if done according to the Word, is laid up for you as treasure in chests and coffers, to be brought out to be rewarded before both men and angels, to your eternal comfort." — John Bunyan

"He who provides for this life but takes no care for eternity is wise for a moment but a fool forever." — John Tillotson

"There are two days on my calendar—"Today" and "That Day." — Martin Luther

"It ought to be the business of every day to prepare for our last day." — Matthew Henry

The courts of Heaven take inventory of each of us and what we do with our lives. The recording of names in the book for the work done reminds us of this. Every day people are used by God to do His work in the world. And He rewards those labors, both now and forever!

Now, before I continue, is it wrong to be motivated by reward? Should we serve God without any eye toward reward, only doing the duty we owe? I don't think that's biblical at all. In fact, Jesus spurs on our works by the promise of reward as a motivator.

Luke 14:12-14 -- 12 He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. 13 But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14 and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

Luke 6:35 -- But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.

Acts 20:35 -- In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

C.S. Lewis -- "If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad thing, I submit that this notion has crept in from [Immanuel] Kant and the Stoics and is no part of the Christian faith. Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak."

What's my point in emphasizing all this? The greatest reward of all is for those who get in the game and labor. In fact, we are motivated to have our names recorded, our deeds witnesses, and rewards promised. We get to not only be a part of the story and incredible things, but the reward!

4:1-3 -- 1 Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged, and he jeered at the Jews. 2 And he said in the presence of his brothers and of the army of Samaria, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore it for themselves?[b] Will they sacrifice? Will they finish up in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, and burned ones at that?" 3 Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, "Yes, what they are building—if a fox goes up on it he will break down their stone wall!"

The opposition begins against the work. Like we discussed last week, any work of God will be followed by ridicule. Notice that they are not physically attacked, but verbally assaulted. Sometimes the most vicious persecution comes from people's words.

4:4-5 -- 4 Hear, O our God, for we are despised. Turn back their taunt on their own heads and give them up to be plundered in a land where they are captives. 5 Do not cover their guilt, and let not their sin be blotted out from your sight, for they have provoked you to anger in the presence of the builders.

Nehemiah does not combat them physically, but he prays. He prays for God to be their vindicator. Nehemiah's prayer follows the model of some of David's prayers in the Psalms, known as imprecatory prayers, because they plead for God to punish the sins of the wicked.

4:6 -- So we built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.

So they continued building despite opposition, and they were able to get the whole wall connected together and up to half of the intended height. Why were they able to achieve this so quickly? Because the people had a mind to work.

Followers of Jesus need to have a mind to work.

We don't work so that we CAN earn God's favor, we work because we HAVE God's favor. We labor out of love because of the labor of Christ for us. We labor because we have tasted and seen that the Lord is good and we want others to taste as well.

4:7-14 -- 7 But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and that the breaches were beginning to be closed, they were very angry. 8 And they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it. 9 And we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection against them day and night. 10 In Judah it was said, "The strength of those who bear the burdens is failing. There is too much rubble. By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall." 11 And our enemies said, "They will not know or see till we come among them and kill them and stop the work." 12 At that time the Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said to us ten times, "You must return to us." 13 So in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in open places, I stationed the people by their clans, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. 14 And I looked and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes."

Sanballat and Tobia and others continued to fight against them. They were angry with the progress being made and the work being done. Nehemiah and the Jews continued to pray for God's protection and favor. And Nehemiah stationed families and individuals along different portions of the wall to work and guard it. They covered every part so as to ensure the entire project was making progress and being watched over. And in Braveheart fashion, Nehemiah gives a speech to the people to remember the Lord is with them, and to fight for their brothers, sons, daughters, wives, and homes.

A grand total of **45 sections** of construction are mentioned through Nehemiah 3, including **10 gates**. One of those gates, the East Gate, sometimes called the Golden Gate, is the gate Christ used as he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. Literally, these people are repairing the gate that Christ will go through as he enters his final week before going to the cross.

But in the same way, because Christ is coming again here, in many ways: the things we labor for today are preparing the return of Christ. You may not have thought about this before but the trees you plant, and buildings we build, and lakes we fish will be here in the New Heavens and New Earth. There is a promise of continuity and discontinuity.

Some things will be different, but many things will remain the same. Your body at the resurrection is one such example. Same body, but different. My point? Our labors here are not simply confined to now. Many of them will last forever.

Also notice that Nehemiah and the leaders had to organize the plans, teams, and supplies. This wasn't an issue of accomplishment. But because the people came together and rallied around the vision they were able to accomplish a ton in a short period of time. Though this is the Old Testament, this is a picture of what the church must look like in how we come together to labor for the building of Christ's kingdom today. We must come together, everyone playing their part and finding their place on the wall, and we must build. Indeed, we are laboring to build the kingdom of God on earth so that when Christ returns, he will be returning to the fruits of our labor. That is what ARISE is about.

Friends, our names will be recorded and remembered in the courts of heaven, just as these names are recorded in Nehemiah. We will either be known for laboring for or, like Sanballat and Tobiah, laboring against. You and I have a choice to make, we can jump into the mix and be used of God to further His story or we can actively labor against Him, what choice do your current actions reveal?

Everyone here has an opportunity. We are committing to "build the walls" of what God has called us to do here.

When we get to the New Testament and we meet Jesus, we find a Jerusalem that has been rebuilt and exiled Jews have returned to their homeland. Even though Jerusalem is a Roman occupied territory during the time of Jesus, it is still a place where Jews are in their homeland, their Temple is rebuilt, and they are able to gather to worship, sacrifice, and hear the teaching of Scriptures. What we often forget is that the reason the Jews are in Israel and able to have their feasts and sacrifices and places of worship, is because Nehemiah has a vision to rebuild the city. The Jews were exiled and the city destroyed, but Nehemiah said, "That is not okay with me."

A small group of people were the catalyst for change in Jerusalem. Their vision for the city and for God to restore people back to the land, led them to labor. We have nearly 1700 folks here. Can you imagine what will happen if we arise, lay hold of this vision, and strengthen our hands to labor? The story of God will be recorded in Lebanon and beyond, and we will spend eternity celebrating the victories and enjoying the rewards.

REVIEW:

- ❖ How many families helped with the work?
- ❖ What type of work did they do? What different roles were there?
- ❖ Why did Sanballat and Tobiah oppose the work?
- ❖ How did Nehemiah respond to the opposition?

REFLECT:

- ❖ What work are you currently doing that will earn you a reward in heaven?
- ❖ What is your true motivation for doing that work?
- ❖ Do you experience opposition to doing the work of God?

RESPOND:

- ❖ What gifts or resources do you have to help our church Arise (1 Peter 4:10, 1 Corinthians 12:12-26)?
- ❖ How will you respond if opposition comes (Matthew 5:44, 5:10-12, Psalm 20:7, John 16:33)?

MEDITATE:

- ❖ Nehemiah 4:14 - *And I looked and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes."*

MEMORIZE:

- ❖ John 16:33 - *I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.*

PRAYER FOCUS:

- ❖ Pastor - **Larry Davis**
- ❖ Ministry - **Student Ministry**
- ❖ Pray for the Lord to give us the courage to stand in the face of opposition as we begin this work. That He will remove any doubts that creep in and give you the confidence to walk boldly in faith.
- ❖ NAMB Church Planter - **Eric Ford** - Kouts, IN - Refuge Church
- ❖ IMB Partners - **Reid & Steppie Carr, Jason Daniels** - Rome, Italy
- ❖ Unreached People Group (UPG): **Japanese in Japan**
- ❖ Population: 118,468,000
- ❖ Christian: 1.2%
- ❖ Evangelical: 0.3%
- ❖ Primary Religion: Buddhism
- ❖ Primary Language: Japanese
- ❖ Status: **Unreached**