

Nehemiah: A Commanding Leader wk3

REVIEW: If you have not been with us lately, we have put our series on elders, A Search for Shepherds, on hiatus for two primary reasons: first, I have been throwing a lot of theology at you, and a type of theology that is not as directly applicable to life as we live it. Please hear me correctly, eldership is VERY applicable to life, and the more you understand what elders are, and how they function, the more you will wonder how this church survived without them. But I understand, in the day to day moments of life, eldership is not at the forefront of most people's minds. Second reason that series is on hiatus, is to give the Constitutional Committee time to work out how eldership looks in THIS church. There is leeway on how eldership is set up, and we have to determine what exactly it looks like here.

So, the last two weeks we have been in the book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah is a great interlude because one of the main themes of the book is leadership. That goes right along with eldership. In the last two weeks we looked at Nehemiah's heart for his people and his land. People he may not have even known, and he is in tears at the report of what happened in the land. We correlated that to what breaks our hearts? We showed the video about human trafficking and the mission that we support called Zoe International that fights against that. I encouraged you all to find what breaks your heart for humanity, and get in the game! Get involved to bring justice to this world.

Last week we looked at Nehemiah's relationship to the king - how he had a kind of "walking on eggshell" relationship with the king. And yet, God picked the right time for Nehemiah to be bold and not just ask the king to go back to rebuild, but also planned ahead and asked the king for supplies. That shows Nehemiah's brilliance as a strategist.

INTRO: This week we look at what happens when Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem. We see more of his leadership in how he formulates a plan for them to rebuild the wall in record time. Turn to Nehemiah 2. We will actually start in verse 8.

- I. Nehemiah comes to town and encounters overwhelming problems
 - A. To start with, the supposed leaders of the region were not happy that Nehemiah is showing up - especially with letters from the king
 1. Sanballat was the governor of the region
 - a) We know this from sources outside the Bible
 - b) Let me slow down and talk about that from history
 - (1) Many people want to blast the Bible because it is a spiritual book with spiritual goals - in other words it has an agenda
 - (a) I won't argue
 - (b) That is true

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- (2) However, many of those same people try to say that because it has an agenda, it cannot be trusted even historically
 - (a) Completely wrong - the Bible is set in history, and the authors appeal to history so that we know things really did happen
 - i) They knew that traceable historical facts needed to be present
 - ii) If not, how could anyone trace the truth of the claims they make?
 - (b) So, for example, Artaxerxes father was Xerxes
 - i) Xerxes was the king when Esther became queen
 - ii) For fans of Hollywood, Xerxes is also the king that tried to invade Greece
 - (1) As did his predecessor, Darius
 - (2) Neither did well there
 - (3) And Xerxes, he is the king that fought the battle at Thermopile
 - (a) The movie "The 300" is based around those events
 - (b) But other than the Greeks losing the battle, the rest of the history of that movie is suspect
 - (c) The point is this, we have proof from the Persian empire of what is taking place, we have proof from the Greek empire of the history of the time
 - i) And in the case of Sanballat, we have a papyrus called, the Elephantine papyri
 - ii) It refers to Sanballat and calls him the governor of Samaria
 - (d) The Bible is not written in a vacuum, it is written in history, and with a little digging, you can find how much of what the Bible says is proven in documents outside itself
- B. The second problem Nehemiah encounters is the size of the task. The walls of Jerusalem were torn down - destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC
 - 1. When we say destroyed, we mean the walls were ripped down so there was almost nothing left
 - 2. The boulders that used to be part of the wall were toppled into valleys below, or had been hauled off, or broken down for other things in the 140 years since they fell
 - 3. (MAP) Conservative estimates are they had between 1.5 to 2.5 miles of wall to rebuild, with gates to put up - this is a sizable task
- C. The third problem for Nehemiah was a history of defeat
 - 1. The first attempt to rebuild failed - They tried in 538 BC - 90 years before

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2. They finally got the temple back up, but that proved difficult
 3. They tried again on the walls (13 years prior), but the governors of the area whined to Artaxerxes like a bunch of little brats and got the work stopped
 4. So the battle to get the walls up was still a fresh defeat to those that lived there
- D. The fourth problem was discouraged workers
1. Given all the previous problems, you can see why they would be discouraged
 2. It's a bit like trying to tackle a problem in church today, "We tried that already" - "It won't work" - "We're too tired to figure it out" "We've always done it like this"
 3. Enter Nehemiah
- II. Nehemiah creates a plan for success, as we will see in the next few weeks
- A. We have seen that Nehemiah was a pray-er
- B. Nehemiah knew that prayer and planning are not opposite activities - they support each other
1. Before talking to the king to come to Jerusalem, he had a plan of attack
 2. He waited for God's good timing to execute that plan - and then Nehemiah gave God the glory for the plan's success
 - a) He knew it was not his doing, but God's
- C. But what was Nehemiah's plan? How did he create this plan to get 1.5-2.5 miles of walls rebuilt?
1. The first thing Nehemiah did was rest
 - a) After a long journey, he would need to be prepared for the task
 - (1) One of the greatest things some of you need to learn how to do is take a nap!
 - (2) I'll be straight with you, some of you have that pride thing going in full gear - you think that nothing can happen without you to be right there to help it along
 - (3) You are wearing yourselves out
 - (a) You are snapping at the spouse, snapping at the kids
 - (b) You don't want to come to grips with the fact that the world will continue to turn, that God is on His throne, even when you go take a nap!
 - (c) Please for the love of God, church, learn how to regularly get rest
 2. The second thing Nehemiah did was go for a ride
 - a) And on this ride he is gathering information
 - (1) He took just a few trusted souls with him

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- (a) That may have been one thing he did in that first three days, talk with people to understand who he could trust
 - (2) He rode, the rest walked - we think to call as little attention to them as possible
 - (a) No large amount of horse or animal noise
 - (b) A small group to attract little attention
 - b) He went out the west side of the city and to the south to inspect the walls, or what was left of them
 - (1) He did not go to the north because the north side of Jerusalem was its most vulnerable place
 - (2) It was attacked more often, and more than likely completely destroyed
 - c) So while Nehemiah is inspecting things, the people with him are seeing all the same old things, whereas Nehemiah is seeing this all fresh and new - and he begins to formulate a plan
- 3. Next Nehemiah visualized a plan of how the task could be completed
 - a) We are not told much of how he formulated his plan in chapter two
 - b) However, we know he must have, because he pumps up the troops in chapter two and then they get busy in chapter three
 - (1) In chapter three we can see what the plan seems to have looked like
 - (2) The plan was probably not full and complete with every detail worked out, but Nehemiah had enough to create a workable plan
 - (3) Nehemiah did not have all the information, but he had all the necessary information, and that made all the difference
- 4. Next, Nehemiah roused the troops
 - a) He reminded them of the problem - "Jerusalem is in ruins!" "The gates have been burned with fire"
 - b) Then he calls them to action - "come let us rebuild so we will no longer be a disgrace"
 - (1) There is something special to understand here
 - (2) The idea of being a disgrace is a disgrace to the nations around them
 - (a) They were a laughingstock
 - (b) And by extension, the God they served was a laughingstock too
 - (c) Nehemiah is rousing the troops in part to make the name of the Lord great again
 - i) Sounds like a campaign slogan, "Let's make Yahweh great again"

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- ii) To be clear, Yahweh did not need anyone's help to be great, in fact He never was less than great - the way the world perceived Him was less than great
- c) If you were in Jerusalem, and had this defeatist attitude about trying to get the walls rebuilt, would you be excited to rebuild yet?
 - (1) I wouldn't
 - (2) It's about motivation and Nehemiah has not laid down enough to motivate me - but he is about to
 - (a) Dale Carnegie tells of a mill manager whose men were not producing
 - i) The owner, Charles Schwab asked the manager "why"
 - ii) The manager couldn't figure it out - I've coaxed them, coached them, swore at them, threatened them - nothing works
 - iii) Schwab asked "How many heats did your shift make today?" The answer came, "six"
 - iv) Schwab picked up a piece of chalk and wrote a big number six on the floor and walked away
 - v) When the night shift came in, they saw the "6" and asked what that was about
 - vi) The manager said the big boss asked how many heats the shift made and wrote that on the floor
 - vii) The next morning Schwab was back and saw the 6 was rubbed out, replaced by the number 7
 - viii) When the day shift saw this and saw the night shift thought they were better, they worked their tails off and at the end of the day replaced the number 7 with the number 10
 - (b) Carnegie concluded that if you want to motivate obstinate men, throw down a challenge
 - d) So Nehemiah tells them how God's gracious hand was with him
 - (a) He tells the story of the timing of asking the king
 - (b) The story of the king's favor, and receiving supplies, and letters to come and rebuild
 - (c) If I heard that, even if I was skeptical, I would be much more apt to jump on board
 - e) No doubt, Nehemiah shared the challenge he had worked out to get the wall rebuilt
 - f) After all of this, they reply, "Let's get to building!"
- 5. Nehemiah also made sure that everyone knew that they were all in this together

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- a) We don't have a lot of what Nehemiah said, or how he said it all, but what we have shows that Nehemiah included himself in the problems of Jerusalem
- b) Read through the inclusive language Nehemiah used
 - (1) v. 17 - You see the trouble WE are in
 - (2) Come let US rebuild
 - (3) WE will no longer be a disgrace
- c) The reality is that as a church, we need to see us as "us"
 - (1) We are in this together
 - (2) So that means many things
 - (3) As Christians
 - (a) We are here to support one another through the trials and tribulations of life
 - i) When is the last time you sent someone a card, or called someone just to tell them you are praying for them
 - ii) No special problem in their life, necessarily, just that God brought them to your mind and you prayed for them
 - iii) Or maybe there is a problem, so you call and tell them how much you care, or send a card
 - (b) As Christians we are here to help each other with the sinful effects of life
 - i) That means when life circumstances get out of control, we rush in to help, to pray, to cry with, or laugh over
 - ii) That means when we are struggling with sin, we offer listening ears, a non-judgmental heart, and remind them that they are made in the image of God, that they are loved by Him, and the gospel is there all over again to repent and come back to Him
 - (4) As a church
 - (a) We are in the church together
 - (b) We are here to see the glory of God proclaimed to the world and we do that together
 - (c) We are here to make the ministries of this church shine for His glory and we do it together
 - (d) I'm about to say something harsh to ya'll, but you know I don't hold back from speaking the truth - ready?
 - (e) If you are a member who is not here to support the ministries of the church for God's glory - turn in your membership
 - i) You are not in this together with the rest of us
 - ii) You are just along for the ride

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- d) We are all in this together so we need to make sure that we really are WE
- 6. Something to note about how Nehemiah motivated the inhabitants of Jerusalem - he never used external motivators
 - a) He did not promise them treats, or money, or food, or anything outside themselves
 - b) He motivated them by internal motivators
 - (1) That they can rebuild the wall
 - (2) That they would not be the disgrace that they have been
 - (3) That they can have safety once more if they all pull together
 - c) So if the people of Jerusalem are motivated by their earthly citizenship, are we motivated by our heavenly citizenship (Phil. 3:20 says our citizenship is in heaven)
 - (1) Don't take this question too lightly
 - (2) Do we really believe that we have heavenly citizenship?
 - (a) Or do we think this is all myth, or a way make people into better, nicer people?
 - (b) If we really believe we are citizens of a heavenly home, are we proud of being a citizen of heaven?
 - (c) Are we motivated by that citizenship?
 - (d) If so, what are the responsibilities of a citizen of heaven?
 - i) Good thing to know

III. Application

- A. We have been talking about the wall being in shambles and the need to rebuild
 - 1. God was obviously with Nehemiah in the process of planning to rebuild Jerusalem
 - 2. I am just wondering if some of you have walked in and you feel less like Nehemiah and more like the wall
 - a) You are a shambles, you feel beat down, and ruined
 - b) Maybe you show it on the outside too, or maybe you hide it very well
 - 3. Where are you in the rebuilding process?
 - a) Are you still like the inhabitants of Jerusalem?
 - (1) Discouraged?
 - (2) Feel like you have tried everything?
 - (3) You are looking at what it would take to rebuild and want to cry?
 - b) Or are you approaching things more like Nehemiah?
 - (1) Nehemiah began with prayer, much prayer, concentrated prayer
 - (2) Then he began to plan, trusting that God was with him in this plan
- B. So where are you at today?

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1. Maybe you are here and you know that you have a relationship with Christ but life has been a shambles
 - a) You feel overwhelmed at the thought of trying anymore
 - b) And you need a fresh wind
 - (1) You know, talking with someone can help
 - (2) Praying with folks can help
 - (3) More than anything, trusting in a God that wants to rebuild will help
2. Maybe you are not sure or you know that you have never started that relationship with Christ
 - a) Life seems shaky
 - b) Life has fallen in around you and you need something more than what you have been doing
 - (1) Or better, Someone different
3. No matter your circumstances, as we close with our song(s) there are some great couples waiting up here to pray with you
 - a) They will talk with you, pray with you
 - b) No one will look at you funny if you step out to talk with these folks
 - (1) In fact, the proper response from a true follower of Christ is pray for anyone coming forward, whether you know their situation of not
 - c) If you don't feel comfortable coming forward, or comfortable with these people
 - (1) Talk to the person sitting with you that you do feel comfortable with
 - (a) And yes, even during the song
 - (b) Again, no one will think weird things
 - (2) Come talk with me after
 - d) But if you are feeling like you are falling apart on the inside, its Einstein's definition of insanity all over again stop "doing the same things over and over again and expecting different results"
 - e) Fall at the feet of the Savior, because He cares for you