

# Nehemiah 3 - Doing the Building

Nehemiah 3

After the praying

And after the inspecting

And after the motivating

There comes the essential next step, the doing, the building.

And I love the fact that Nehemiah records the Building

But really what he records

Are the people who do the Building

Because people are called to build in this life

In this life we are called to build, to make, to create, to bring into this world something

A thing that is built.

And we are called to build up the house of God,

The people of God.

What was it Jesus said, after his most famous sermon

“The one who listens to my words and obeys them is like the wise man who **builds** on the rock”

Or to the Thessalonians, Paul writes

“Therefore encourage one another and build one another up” - 1 Thess 5:11

Or in a very profound passage in Ephesians 2, we are told that the Holy Spirit is building us up into a dwelling place for God, but then Ephesians 4 we are told about the body

“But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love.” - Ephesians 4

Building, and building up is a key idea of what is going on in our community

We are to be built, and we participate in that building with God

So Nehemiah stands as a picture for us of being built up

And also a practical picture, because building is hard practical work,

Which takes time, and you never think you are going to get there, but keep going one brick at a time, the job will indeed get done.

\*\*\*\* Bob the Builder - Victoria Wood

So let's look at this building, and as we go along we'll note a few points of interest. So let's pick up on these...

Firstly we start at the sheep gate, which is near the temple, and where the sheep of sacrifice will come - and who builds this - but the Priests.... Priests to do building, not just any priests too but also the High Priest.

Do priests know about building? No, but they have to be prepared to do something that isn't their thing - that is what the building up needs - doing things that are not your specialism - in fact, in the whole of this building exercise, nobody is referred to as having a career in construction

And also I love though that the Priests blessed the wall, consecrated them, and the gate is blessed - because a city is not just walls but also gates, so you bless the connections, in fact you bless everything, the wall and the gate? How is a blessed wall different from a wall that hasn't been blessed, I don't know. But I do know that these walls are blessed, and this door is blessed, because these are the places where we go to worship - there is something about these which is special.

Moving round, we come to the Men of Jericho - I love the irony of men from a place which had its walls brought down, and then had its rebuilding banned, they are the ones who are building Jerusalem. I am not sure what this is about, but even the thing you are banned from doing, or even the thing that is painful in your history, that is still brought into what you do in God. I am not sure who that is a word for, but if you are banned from it, you might not be banned from doing it for God.

We keep going round some names, the Sons of Haasenah, Meremoth Son of Uriah - these are names, but these names count - imagine having your great-grandfather as Haasenah, you would know Nehemiah 2:3. I remember the experience that we had a few years ago in Breadalbane when the young people there go on a day trip to Auschwitz, and that is already a deeply shocking, personal experience. But a few years ago, some of the people going were from Poland, they were able to find the names of family members

- names matter, people matter. And God likes us to remember names, because God remembers names.

We get to the men of Tekoites, and their nobles did not work, did not put their shoulder to the work, the only negative mention in the whole story, but the Tekoites worked, even though their bosses were slouches, in fact there is a remarkable thing that we meet them again in verse 27 - the only people who had lazy bosses were the only people who did a double section of wall - the moral here would seem to be, even if you have a lazy boss, do the work; don't let your bosses behaviour stop you doing from what you need to do, in fact you could almost do the opposite.

Then we go on through more names

Joiada son of Pasha

Melatiah the Gibeonite

Jabon the Meronothite

They were from the province beyond the River,

But they still did the work, wanted to be part of what God was going,

Missionaries from another place, and people welcomed them

To do the work here, we need people who have come from another place.

Yes Jerusalem was built with the essential help of non-locals

Outsiders, but still they help.

Or take the next verses (v8)

Uzziel son of Harhaiah, who is a goldsmith - so happy to get his hands dirty

Next to

Hananiah - one of the perfumers

He makes perfume

But he has gone down in history of bricklaying

Then we read of the people of Rephaiah son of Our

Ruler of half the district

Note that they could have taken he huff, who was this Nehemiah telling them what to do, they were in charge

But instead they realised what God was doing, and they joined in.

People prepared to put aside their own power structures for the sake of the common goal.

Mission is about realising what God is doing in the world and then joining in with it  
Regardless of your status, regardless of what people had the idea

Now I like Rephaiah, but the group I really love here is Shallum son of Hallohesh

So he is like Rehaiah, he is a ruler, and he joins in

But check this out....this requires a bit of detective work

The group in verse 11 - Malchijah and his crew, repaired the tower of ovens

And the group in verse 13 - Hanna and the inhabitants of Zanoah - they repaired Valley Gate.

Look at the section in between

It is huge

And it is the only section in which women are explicitly mentioned

What does that tell you?

We now go around, and there seem to be a lot of people concentrated into this section

This is the section around the palace, the pools - because water is so important in a city like this, and this is a pool in which Jesus will do a hearing, this part here, the complicated part requires a lot of work.

Note also that in verse 23, we have Benjamin and Hasshub make a repair opposite their house

I am guessing that might have wound some people up

Why do they do their own house, and we all do everyone else's houses

How does that work?

But they maybe have their own reasons - we don't know, but people trust them just to build

Do the bit you're meant to do, and trust the rest and their motives

What is important is that we build

And not get hung up on the quirks.

And we keep going round and round until we get to the Goldsmiths, who make repairs all the way back to the sheep gate again, where you remember we started with the priests.

Note as well that we went anti-clockwise, because that's the way you go when you write from right to left.

So what do we say to all of this.

The first thing I notice is that loads of people had loads of excuses not to do this work  
They were from a different place  
They were used to making perfume  
It was not their house  
They had more to do than everyone else  
This was a time to get rid of excuses - everyone worked

When I have spoken to people who have built up Churches, the thing that they say time and time again is a lot of work, a lot of giving themselves to the task, the ordinary ordinary work of building bricks.

And if we are to build up the house of God, it is not a big spectacular moment, it is lots and lots of bricks. Forgetting the excuses, forgetting that don't think we are good at this, it is simply doing the work. You might be daunted at serving others  
Remember that a perfumer maker built the wall  
You might not think you are very good at walls  
Remember that a priest built the sheep gate  
You might be fed up that you seem to be doing more  
Remember that the Tekoites built two sections even though their nobles did not help

What is the work that you are called to?

It is that wonderful verse in Ephesians 2:10

"We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works,  
Which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them"

Are you using excuses? Do the work

Do you not think you are very good? Do the work?

What a wonderful thing it is to have built up the people of God, the house of God.  
Do the work.

## **Points to Christ**

The second thing I want to think about is the way that this points to Christ,  
Who came as an ordinary labourer into this world

To show that the work of being human was not going to be something he avoided  
He was not like the nobles of Tekoites  
He was more like the ruler of half of Jerusalem  
In fact that one who enlisted daughters given that Jesus' chief helpers were women  
And he did more work than anyone else.

Remember that he did both types of work  
He was a rabbi and he was a carpenter  
I loved the way that when George McLeod built the Abbey in Iona  
He by the way who was so useless with his hands, he couldn't even change a plug  
Yet he learnt to build an Abbey  
And recruited the joiners and masons to build, and the ministers to build alongside them.

This was Christ.

I think of the moment that Jesus died, inside the walls of Jerusalem  
In John's gospel we are told his last words  
"It is finished"

The work is finished  
For Jesus the whole of the work was finished  
The work of drawing all people to himself  
But he also included the work of turning water into wine  
And the work of building tables and building houses and doing carpentry  
The work of building up people,  
And the work dying for them  
He finished all his work.

Work is always a mixture of the spiritual or the material

So think of Jesus, God who came amongst us as a carpenter, a craftsman  
Who did everything for us.

There is a prayer, which probably comes from George McLeod although I am not sure,  
which blends these two ideas together,  
"Oh Christ the master carpenter, who at the last, through wood and nails  
Purchased our whole salvation  
Wield well your tools

So that we who come rough hewn to your bench  
May be fashioned into a truer beauty of your hand."

## **Building up the Church**

And finally note that Nehemiah did not build the walls,  
I assume he was in there somewhere  
But he did that as a group of people together  
Sometimes we can paint the picture of Nehemiah as the heroic leader  
But that is not the story this chapter tells  
It says that this could only happen because everyone did their bit  
Their section of the wall  
Some times they built their own homes  
Some times they helped out with other peoples  
But they built - they built where God had planned for them.

And if we are to rebuild this Church, if we are to rebuild this society  
If we are to rebuild our communities, and its wall  
If we are to overcome the taunts of those who say this cannot be done  
This will be something that we will all do together  
Every one of us  
Will do the work  
And may we have the joy too of being welcomed into the arms of the master and saying  
to him  
"It is finished"

AMEN