

7-5-20

Sermon- God's Call to Rebuild a Nation

Scripture- Nehemiah 8:5-12, CTW- Psalm 45:10-17

Hymns- 39, 758

Theme- Before rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, we are told that Nehemiah fasted and prayed, which is a powerful weapon for the Christian. Under the direction of God's Word, in cooperation with each other, we can achieve much. There is no substitute to obedience, and when we follow His will and way, there is a confidence that produces courage and conviction. This is a good thing to think about for the 4th of July weekend!

I. INTRODUCTION: Rebuilding to Honor God

Have you visited the story of Nehemiah lately? I recently did a devotion based on the rebuilding of Jerusalem's Wall, but today I would like to go a bit further in its application.

What a great lesson for all of us as we go through such a time as this, when we call out for the comfort of God. Speaking of which, the name Nehemiah means "the Lord Comforts", and this book is meant to be the companion book to Ezra, whose name means "the Lord has helped".

Nehemiah's call was to rally the people of God around the cause and purpose of God. He and the many people God inspired him to gather, rebuilt the walls of the city which had been destroyed when the Babylonians conquered the city of Jerusalem and forced many of her people to take a 500 mile march to Babylon and live enslaved lives there (see Daniel).

Ezra focused on rebuilding the Temple, which of course had been destroyed. It took a dynamic and united movement of the Spirit of God in His people to accomplish this and it would take the same thing for Nehemiah's task of rebuilding the wall...and it will take the same thing for all of us to rebuild things in this country and the world when the pandemic is over.

A. Key to Nehemiah's story is the focus on heart issues.

His experience serves as a great example of Godly leadership stepping up in times of need and saying yes to God's purpose, creating cooperation among the people by casting the vision of a well thought out and pragmatic plan...from the heart.

Nehemiah shows us that God calls His people to persevere in the face of intimidation and discouragement knowing that "the joy of the Lord is our strength". **Verse 8:10.**

Verse 4:20, accentuates the need for us to trust in God- "At whatever place you hear the sound of the trumpet, (a ram's horn Shofar...historically the announcement of the presence of God), rally to us there, because our God will fight for us." God would also "strengthen their hands." **Verse 6:9.**

Nehemiah also had to remind them, and us that in order to do the work of God and achieve the kinds of results that He requires, the people of God needed to fear the Lord above all else, regardless of what difficulties they faced on earth. **Verse 5:1.**

As a result of God's guidance and care and Nehemiah's strength to follow, this huge task was completed in 52 days. Verse **6:15-16 tells us:** "When all our enemies heard it, and all the nations surrounding us saw it, they lost their confidence, for they recognized that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God."

The question in our minds should be how do we accomplish that... so that others might see the presence of God in our work!

At the very beginning of his accomplishment, we are told that Nehemiah fasted and prayed, which is a powerful weapon for the Christian.

Under the direction of God's Word, in cooperation with each other, we can achieve much. There is no substitute to obedience, and when we follow His will and way, there is a confidence that produces courage and conviction.

Nehemiah was a layman, cupbearer to the great Artaxerxes who ruled Persia from 464 to 423 B.C. Nehemiah's name means The Lord has comforted.

A cupbearer was much more than our modern butler (**See Gen. 40**). It was a position of great responsibility and privilege. At each meal, he tested the king's wine to make sure it wasn't poisoned. A man who stood that close to the king in public had to be handsome, cultured, knowledgeable in court procedures, and able to converse with the king and advise him if asked (**see Gen. 41:1-13**). Because he had access to the king, the cupbearer was a man of great influence, which he could use for good or for evil.

The nation of Israel was not very strong after the return from captivity, the morale was low. The opposing nations wanted to keep Jerusalem in bad shape. Here is a timeline:

In 538 B.C., Cyrus of Persia allowed the Jews to return home.

536 B.C., about 50,000 returned from captivity to Jerusalem.

535 B.C., the Temple reconstruction began.

515 B.C., the Temple was completed.

458 B.C., Ezra returned

445 B.C., Over 90 years after the return of the Jews to Jerusalem, Nehemiah returned to rebuild the walls of the city.

In Nehemiah's time it was important to the safety of a city's inhabitants that there be a strong, high wall surrounding their homes and businesses. Only in this way could threatening hordes be kept at bay.

So there was joy among the returning citizens of Jerusalem as the gaps in the wall were filled in. The task was completed because the people had a mind to work, and as they worked, they lifted up their cause to God in prayer.

It was an example of the statement by Saint Augustine: "Pray as if everything depends on God and work as if everything depends on you."

This is great information for all of us as we go about fixing what needs to be fixed in this world!

II. Nehemiah Gave Up A Lot To Do What Was Best For His Country. It Takes Sacrifice To Build A Great Nation.

A. Fifty-six men signed the Declaration of Independence. Their conviction resulted in untold sufferings for themselves and their families. Of the 56 men, five were captured by the British and tortured before they died. Twelve had their homes ransacked and burned. Two lost their sons in the Revolutionary Army. Another had two sons captured. Nine of the fifty-six fought and died from wounds or hardships of the war.

Carter Braxton of Virginia, a wealthy planter and trader, saw his ships sunk by the British navy. He sold his home and properties to pay his debts and died in poverty.

At the battle of Yorktown, the British General Cornwallis had taken over Thomas Nelson's home for his headquarters. Nelson quietly ordered General George Washington to open fire on the Nelson home. The home was destroyed and Nelson died bankrupt.

John Hart was driven from his wife's bedside as she was dying. Their thirteen children fled for their lives. His fields and mill were destroyed. For over a year, he lived in forest and caves, returning home only to find his wife dead and his children vanished. A few weeks later, he died from exhaustion.

B. Today our nation is at a crossroads. Will you be one of those great people who make a difference, or will you be one of those pessimists who complain, but do nothing to make things better? Even with all the problems our society has, it is still the greatest nation on earth in which to live. Let us work to keep it that way!

Have you thought about what will it take?

III. To Build A Great Nation, It Takes People Who Care.

1. Nehemiah cared enough to ask. 1:1-3

Sometimes we just turn a blind eye to what is going on around us. We need to care enough to ask how things are going before we can do anything about it.

2. Nehemiah cared enough to weep. 1:4

How many times have you been heartbroken over what is going on around you? Difference makers are the ones who are driven by the passion to make things better.

3. Nehemiah cared enough to pray. **1:5-10**

Before we take off and act, we must take the time to pray. He prayed for over 4 months before he got any kind of answer from God. The answer was not what he may have expected.

4. Nehemiah cared enough to volunteer. **1:11**

A lot of people claim to care, but few are willing to be a part of the solution.

IV. To Build a great nation, it takes faith.

A. Nehemiah had the faith to wait on God. 2:1-3

Nehemiah had been praying for a solution to the problem. Now he is before the king. The king is going to provide him an answer to his prayer. I do not believe this is what Nehemiah envisioned when he started praying.

Some of you here today may so passionate about our country that you will run for a political office in order to help make things better.

B. Nehemiah had the faith to ask the king to fix the problem. 2:4-8

Nehemiah prayed once again for guidance. Is this what we have been praying for?

C. Nehemiah had the faith to challenge others to action. 2:11-18a

The plan is in motion, but for great plans to take place, it takes the ability to motivate other people to act along with you. The job could not be done alone!

D. Finally, Nehemiah assesses the situation and then recruits help. 17-18. Have you thought about your ability to recruit others in the task for the kingdom as a spiritual gift in and of itself? Exhortation...the ability to urge and convince someone to do something, is a God given talent...if you have it, use it!

By the way, **Romans 12:6-8** lists spiritual gifts as serving, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, and mercy...check your list!

V. To Build A Great Nation, It Takes Work.

Philosopher Edmund Burke said All that is necessary for evil to prevail is that good men do nothing

A. Throughout chapters 3-6 we have the rebuilding of the wall.

The task was a daunting one. When we look out and see some things we do not like, we must not get discouraged at the size of the task. We have many laws on the books that are there because one person saw an injustice and sought to fix it.

The work was hard; there was a lot of opposition. Whenever you are trying to change things, there will be opposition. The founding fathers faced what seemed like an impossible task when they took on the greatest military power on the earth at the time.

VI. To build a great nation, opposition will be faced.

1. There Will Be Verbal Assault. 4:1-3

2. There Will Be Intimidation. 4:7-9

When verbal assaults did not stop the work, then the opposition resorted to intimidation. We must be prepared for this when we are trying to make things better.

3. There Will Be Discouragement. 4:10

Sometimes the task can be overwhelming and the criticisms and intimidation take their toll on our energy and resolve to do God's work.

4. There Will Be Fear. 4:11-23

In verses 11-23 we see the fear starting to set in. Nehemiah sees this and formulates a plan to combat the problem. When we face fear, we must over-come it. Nehemiah had one half of the servants work and the other half were to carry a spear.

5. There Will Be Deception

When intimidation, slander and other methods do not keep us from doing what we are called to do, then we can expect some deception to take place.

6. There Will Be Slander. 6:5-9, when this did not work, they resorted to lying about what was going on. We see this today in politics. If one side does not like what the other is going to do, then they will stretch the truth about it.

VII. CONCLUSION

We must become and remain vigilant: Thomas Jefferson reminds us that "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty."

We see the wisdom of this advice in many areas of our lives. Years before Nehemiah and the Jews returned to Jerusalem, their ancestors had failed to be vigilant against the threats of idolatry and other forms of ungodliness. They eventually paid the price through their captivity in a foreign land. Now, to retain their newly gained freedom, they had to do their work with vigilance, always being ready to fight off an attack from their enemies. The same vigilance is needed by the people of God today: **1 Peter 5:8** is a good reminder of this: "Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."

If we are going to restore our nation to its greatness, it is going to take Christians who care. People who care enough to come out of the comfort of our homes and do something about the decline of society.

If we are going to restore our nation, it is going to take people who have enough faith in God, not to write off the society.

If we are going to restore our nation, it is going to take people who are willing to work for change.

If we are going to restore our nation, it is going to take people who are willing to stand up against many of the unrighteous causes. It is going to take people who are willing to stand for righteousness.

To quote Patrick Henry "It cannot be emphasized too strongly or too often that this great nation was founded, not by religionists,

but by Christians, not on numerous religions, but on the gospel of Jesus Christ!" Amen! Let Us Pray!