

**Victory of the Lamb**  
**September 19, 2021**  
**Sermon series: Forward: No matter what**  
**Sermon theme: Getting to work**

**Nehemiah 2:11-18**

<sup>11</sup> I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days <sup>12</sup> I set out during the night with a few others. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on.

<sup>13</sup> By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire. <sup>14</sup> Then I moved on toward the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was not enough room for my mount to get through; <sup>15</sup> so I went up the valley by night, examining the wall. Finally, I turned back and reentered through the Valley Gate. <sup>16</sup> The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work.

<sup>17</sup> Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." <sup>18</sup> I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me.

**They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work.**

I played college football. Ok, not really. I was second string and sometimes I got in on special teams. Although I wasn't very good, I felt like I had an important role to play. We had a team captain named Carlos Leyrer. He was by far the best player on the team. Some people believed that he could have played division 1 football. But what I admired most about Carlos was not his ability, but his leadership. Before every game he would tell us, "Don't be the hero. Just play your part. If everybody plays their part we will win this game." That really made sense to me. I didn't need to make a big play. I just need to fill the hole that I was supposed to fill. I just needed to block the person I was supposed to block. And every everyone of us did our job, we would win the game.

The same goes in the kingdom of God and the work of the church. There is only one hero, Jesus Christ. He is the captain. As for us, none of us are called to be the hero. We are just called to play our part. Fulfill our role. What are you called to do? What is your God-given purpose? **What is your role in God's kingdom?**

To answer those questions, we are going to go to the book of Nehemiah. We are continuing our sermon series **Forward, no matter what** and in this series, we are looking at how Nehemiah moved God's people forward in their mission.

The year when our text took place was 444 B.C. But really to understand that significance of Nehemiah, I need to take you back 1000 years before Nehemiah.

- **1440 B.C. Moses leads the Israelites out of Egypt.**

God's people were in slavery for over 400 years, but Moses led them out of Egypt, through the wilderness, and eventually they made it to the Promised Land.

- **1000 B.C. Israel becomes a monarchy.**

After 400 years of tribal leaders called Judges, Israel is fed up and asked God to give them a king like the rest of the nations. So they have their first king Saul. He is a total failure. Then the second king is David. We spent 9 weeks talking about David. He was a good king, yet very flawed. Then his son, Solomon became king. The kingdom flourished under Solomon and had a time of peace. One of Solomon's greatest accomplishments was that he built the Temple for the Lord and a large wall around it. But Solomon married about 1000 women and brought idolatry and evil practices into Israel. And because of his sin, Israel was divided into two.

- **722 B.C. Assyria destroys the northern kingdom of Israel.**

The northern kingdom was carried off into exile by the Assyrians. They were displaced with a group of people called the Samaritans. And the Israelites from the north were never heard of again.

- **605 B.C. Babylon destroys the Temple and carries Judah (Jews) into exile for 70 years.**

The remaining tribe of Judah did not learn from the idolatrous practices of the northern tribes. They followed their idolatry, and so God allowed Nebuchadnezzar to carry them off into exile for 70 years. Their Temple was destroyed and the walls were torn down.

- **538 B.C. Cyrus, the King of Persia, funds the return of the exiles and the rebuilding of the Temple.**

The Persians took over Babylon and they funded the rebuilding of the Temple. They had some starts and stops to the project because of opposition from the Samaritans and because of their own selfish laziness. But after twenty years, the Temple was rebuilt.

- **444 B.C. Nehemiah believes he is called by God to rebuild the walls around the Temple.**

Although the Temple had been rebuilt, the walls surrounding the Temple were still charred from the Babylonian invasion, which took place 150 years before Nehemiah. The Temple in Jerusalem looked like a really nice house surrounded by a rickety old, broken-down fence. And Nehemiah believed God had called him to rebuild it.

Why? Why was this project so important to God and important to Nehemiah? First of all, the Temple was the place where heaven and earth met. This is where God showed his presence and his power and his forgiveness. Also, God had promised through the prophet Zechariah that the Messiah was going to come at any moment and come through these gates and enter into this temple. And so they need to get this house ready for the king of Glory, Jesus Christ.

So last week Pastor Bill said that after Nehemiah heard that the walls were still not built back up, he prayed a prayer of confession and repentance. He confessed that he as well as the rest of the people of God were not faithful. They had not made God and his Word and his house a priority. Then Nehemiah asked King Artaxerxes to go to Jerusalem and rebuild this Temple. This is where our text picks up.

At night, Nehemiah does a thorough inspection of the walls around Jerusalem. He goes all by himself. He was a firsthand look at the problem. He wants to see the situation and let God lead him to guide the people. And he is horrified at what he sees. The walls around Jerusalem are in ruin. It is a dump. Not only are the people of God vulnerable to attack, their lack of ownership shows their lack of faith and dedication to God. As the prophet Haggai said, “The people live in their fancy paneled houses, while the house of God lies in ruins.

So the next day, Nehemiah gathers the leaders together and says, **“You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire.” (Nehemiah 2:17)** Nehemiah says, “we” are in trouble. This is our problem. We have let Jerusalem be in ruins. We have let the gates remained charred with fire. It’s been 150 years since Babylon invaded. We built the Temple, but we never finished the work.

So Nehemiah lays out this vision and gives this command, **“Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.” (Nehemiah 2:17)** Nehemiah says, “We have a problem. And we need to fix it.” We need to own this problem. And we need to work together to fix the problem.

And guess what? The people listened to Nehemiah. The Bible says, **They replied, “Let us start rebuilding.” So they began this good work. (Nehemiah 2:18)** The people took ownership. They said “let us start rebuilding.” They all got involved and starting doing the good work that God was calling them too.

So how does this apply to us? What is our Temple? What are our walls today? Well, the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed about 40 years after Jesus by the Romans. And it was never rebuilt. Is God calling us to go to Jerusalem and rebuild that physical Temple? No. Because after Jesus rose from the dead, on the day of Pentecost, the glory of the Lord that used to fill the Temple, came upon God’s people as flames of fire. In other words, God was telling his people that God’s presence has left the building. We are his Temple.

The Apostle Peter says it this way in the New Testament, **<sup>4</sup>As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—<sup>5</sup>you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:4-5)**

When you come to Christ, when you become a Christian, you become part of God’s new Temple. You are all living stones that are built up into a spiritual house.

But unfortunately, in the words of Nehemiah, **““You see the trouble we are in: *the Christian Church* lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire.”** The Christian church is not strong. We are not growing stronger, nor are we reaching new people. Last week, Pastor Bill said that our young people are the first post-Christian generation. And as a church we are not really growing. We are really not reaching new people. Even here at Victory, most of our growth is transfer growth from other churches. We are really not reaching and loving our neighbors.

So what can we learn from Nehemiah and God’s people? Well, Nehemiah 3 might be one of the least interesting chapters in the whole Bible. It is a list of names and an explanation of the work they didn’t. It says, So and so was assigned such and such section of the wall. They finished their work. And next to them, the family of so and so worked on such and such part of the wall and they finished their work.

Because each family did their part to rebuild the wall, it was rebuilt in 52 days! That is remarkable! For about 100 years they had money from King Cyrus to rebuild the Temple and the walls. They rebuilt the Temple, but they stopped working. 100 years they had a bad fence around the temple. But then when they put their energy and focus into their section of the wall, they rebuilt the whole thing in 52 days!

Now what's the application for us? Like the captain of my football team told our college football team, **"You don't need to be the hero. Just do your part."** Jesus is the hero. Jesus is the focus. Jesus gives us the energy and purpose. And he has called all of us to do our part to strengthen the people of God, the New Testament Church.

But how do we do that? First of all, recognize that what we do on Sunday at church is just practice. I would encourage everyone here to find a place to participate on Sunday morning. When I was at seminary, this church was just starting. And Pastor Ben Kuerth, the founding pastor of this church let me preach to practice. At that time, this church was meeting in at Polonia soccer field, basically their bar. And every Sunday, this church had to turn a bar into a church. Then when this church moved to the movie theater, the same thing happened. I remember visiting Victory and everyone had to help. Because you had to turn a movie theater into a church every Sunday. Now that we are at a building, we have lost some of that spirit of ownership. But all the needs are still here. Every week, we need to turn this building into a welcoming place of worship. And there is a place for everyone to participate. I would encourage everyone to go to **Votl.life/serve** and find some way to participate in greeting, welcoming, serving, cleaning, ushering, etc. As we serve we all become part of the family.

But what happens on Sunday morning is just practice. What happens in our day to day life is the real game. This is where the kingdom of God and the world meet up. So, what is your part of the wall? What is your role in the Church during the week?

Here is one way that you can find out. Think about a particular burden that you see. Some kind of trouble. Some kind of suffering. Something that just isn't the way it is supposed to be. Then think about how God has unique wired you and called you to serve in the world. There are actually cards in front of you that I would like you to fill out.

**In a world of \_\_\_\_\_, I \_\_\_\_\_**

**Daily action steps:**

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Here is how I filled out that card:

**In a world of superficial spirituality, I help others deepen their walk with Jesus.**

**Daily action steps:**

- **Seek God's will in his Word.**
- **Enjoy people by being present to their needs.**
- **Think clearly.**

- **Read widely.**

I try to read through this personal mission statement and action steps every day. It reminds me what part of the wall God has called me to rebuild. It reminds me what role I want to play in rebuilding the church of God.

How about you? Yes, we all want to practice our faith and use our gifts here a church. And everybody has part to play. But what is your role during the week? What is your part of the wall that you are called to rebuild? What is burden that God is laying on your heart? Take some time to fill out that personal mission statement. If you are having trouble, I would be happy to help. Also, when you have filled it out, if you are willing, send it to me. I would be interested to see where you see God calling you to serve.

There is only one hero: Jesus Christ. He is the true Temple. He is the foundation. He is our answer. Our Savior. He is everything. And he has decided to give us all a role to play in rebuilding his house, the church of God. Fulfill your role. Play your part. Do the work that God has uniquely given to you to do. Remember when God's people put their energy and focus into their part in the wall, they were able to rebuild the walls in 52 days. What could God do with us if we put our energy and our focus in our part of the wall? With God's help and for his glory, let's get to work. Let's do our part. Let God's will be done so that his kingdom would come among us. Amen.