

Victory of the Lamb // October 17, 2021 // Pastor Ben Sadler
Series: Forward No Matter What // Remaining Faithful to the Work

When we lived in Florida, we bought a house that had beautiful landscaping. The woman who lived there before must have been a master gardener. There were flowers and ferns everywhere. But do you know what after we had been there a year, the yard didn't look that same. The flowers weren't as bright and the ferns weren't as plentiful. Why? Because we had not done the necessary work and given the necessary attention to the landscaping to maintain her vision of a beautiful garden.

The vision of this church is something that we inherited. Pastor Ben Kuerth started the vision for this church to reach people. And this church has grown from a small group that met in a house, to the community room at Polonia soccer field, to the budget cinema, and now we are in this beautiful building. The question is what are we going to do with this mission and this church that we have inherited? Are we going to pull out the weeds of doubt and false teaching? And are we going to water our hearts and make them grow? Or are we going to neglect this vision and let it die?

We are concluding our sermon series **Forward: No Matter What**. And in this sermon series we have been talking about Nehemiah's God-sized vision to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem and reform the people of God. And today we want to answer the following question: **How can we maintain God's vision until the very end?**

Let's dive into our text and find out.

⁶ But while all this was going on, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had returned to the king. Some time later I asked his permission ⁷ and came back to Jerusalem. Here I learned about the evil thing Eliashib had done in providing Tobiah a room in the courts of the house of God. ⁸ I was greatly displeased and threw all Tobiah's household goods out of the room. ⁹ I gave orders to purify the rooms, and then I put back into them the equipment of the house of God, with the grain offerings and the incense.

After Nehemiah had rebuilt the walls around Jerusalem and he completed his mission, he returned to Persia to work for the king. But he heard that God's people were backsliding. They were not the strong believers on a mission that they once were. The High Priest Eliashib had given a room to Tobiah in the courts of the Temple of the Lord. Remember Tobiah? He was one of the enemies who had tried to stop the rebuilding of the walls.

That leads to another question: Why was there even a room for Tobiah in the first place?

¹⁰ I also learned that the portions assigned to the Levites had not been given to them, and that all the Levites and musicians responsible for the service had gone back to their own fields. ¹¹ So I rebuked the officials and asked them, "Why is the house of God neglected?" Then I called them together and stationed them at their posts.

¹² All Judah brought the tithes of grain, new wine and olive oil into the storerooms...

¹⁴ Remember me for this, my God, and do not blot out what I have so faithfully done for the house of my God and its services.

The reason that Tobiah, the enemy of God's people, had a place to stay was because the Lord's house was being neglected. Tobiah was staying where the tithes and offerings and articles of worship usually were stored. But because the people had neglected the house of God, Tobiah had a place to stay.

So Nehemiah reestablished the house of God. He kicked Tobiah out. He filled the storerooms with the tithes and offerings. He knew that the only way that God's people were going to continue to carry out their vision was if they had this sacred place of worship.

Here is what Nehemiah is teaching us about our vision:

Our vision is only as strong as our people.

If we are going to carry out our mission to reach today's people we need to be as spiritually strong as possible. And how do we do that? We need to have our own sacred place of worship. I know that some of you can't come to this facility because of distance or because of health reasons. But do you have a sacred place to gather with other Christians and receive the Word and the Sacrament? Here is our first take home point. To be as strong as possible we need to:

1. Devote a **sacred place for the Lord.**

What else was Nehemiah concerned about?

¹⁵ In those days I saw people in Judah treading winepresses on the Sabbath and bringing in grain and loading it on donkeys, together with wine, grapes, figs and all other kinds of loads. And they were bringing all this into Jerusalem on the Sabbath... ¹⁷ I rebuked the nobles of Judah and said to them, "What is this wicked thing you are doing—desecrating the Sabbath day? ¹⁸ Didn't your ancestors do the same things, so that our God brought all this calamity on us and on this city? Now you are stirring up more wrath against Israel by desecrating the Sabbath."

¹⁹ When evening shadows fell on the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I ordered the doors to be shut and not opened until the Sabbath was over...²² Then I commanded the Levites to purify themselves and go and guard the gates in order to keep the Sabbath day holy.

Remember me for this also, my God, and show mercy to me according to your great love.

The Lord God had given the Israelites the Sabbath, which was their Saturday as a sacred day for rest and worship. They were not to work on this day, but to devote this whole day to the Lord.

If we are going to be as strong as possible as individuals then we also need sacred time for rest and worship. Traditionally, Christians have set aside Sunday as a day of rest because it was on Sunday that Jesus rose from the dead. What is your day of rest and worship? We devote times and days for work and sports. But do we devote a day for rest and worship.

2. Devote **sacred time to the Lord.**

We would like to think we could worship God at any time and any place. And that is true. But what we schedule and prioritize actually changes us and gets done.

What was the third area where Nehemiah was concerned?

²³ Moreover, in those days I saw men of Judah who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. ²⁴ Half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod or the language of one of the other peoples, and did not know how to speak the language of Judah. ²⁵ I rebuked them and called curses down on them. I beat some of the men and pulled out their hair. I made them take an oath in God's name and said: "You are not to give your daughters in marriage to their sons, nor are you to take their daughters in marriage for your sons or for yourselves. ²⁶ Was it not because of marriages like these that Solomon king of Israel sinned? Among the many nations there was no king like him. He was loved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel, but even he was led into sin by foreign women. ²⁷ **Must we hear now that you too are doing all this terrible wickedness and are being unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women?"**

²⁸ One of the sons of Joiada son of Eliashib the high priest was son-in-law to Sanballat the Horonite. And I drove him away from me.

²⁹ Remember them, my God, because they defiled the priestly office and the covenant of the priesthood and of the Levites...Remember me with favor, my God.

Nehemiah knew that the most powerful force for spiritual growth in the life of God's people was the family. That is why he was so concerned that God's people were marrying unbelievers and accepting their pagan and secular customs, language, and practices. He was especially concerned that their leaders were marrying unbelieving spouses. He reminded them that his is what happened to Solomon. He was a great king that followed the Lord, but when he married unbelieving women he was led astray.

If we are going to be a strong people of God we must prioritize our families. Your family is the primary way you change the world. It is through your family that you will have the greatest impact on the world. It is through your family that thousands of generations will be cursed or blessed. This is especially important for me as one of the leaders of this church. In the NT, Paul says that if pastors can't lead their families in God's Word they have no business leading the family of God.

3. Devote a **sacred people to the Lord.**

Bring your kids and teens to church. Let them see you pray.

Why is this so hard? Why is it so hard to be devoted to the Lord? Why is it so hard to devote a sacred place, time, and people to the Lord? Well Jesus explains in succinctly the night before he was crucified when he was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. He told his disciples:

"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The **spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Matthew 26:41)**

Our spirit willing follows Jesus and wants to do good. But we also have a sinful flesh that is weak. That is why it is so easy for the church to drift and stray. That is why we constantly need to prioritize our spiritual growth. And that's why we need someone greater than Nehemiah to lead us. We need Jesus who came to live and die and be raised to life us.