

Nehemiah 3:1-14
“As We Are Able”
Sunday March 11th, 2018

The great football coach Vince Lombardi is purported to have said, “The best defense is a good offense.” Well... back in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah it was almost completely the opposite, “A great offense is a good defense.” That is why the Israelites returning from the Exile received such great opposition and resistance to rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. Their neighbors feared this was the beginning again of Israelite expansion. Let’s hear them in their own words that they wrote to the King of Persia to get the Jews to stop their work.

Ezra 4:12-13, “The king should know that the Jews who came up to us from you have gone to Jerusalem and are rebuilding that rebellious and wicked city. They are restoring the walls and repairing the foundations. ... if this city is built and its walls are restored, no more taxes, tribute or duty will be paid, and the royal revenues will suffer.”

I had asked myself what is the big deal about rebuilding the wall around the city? Well, this was a defensive structure that when completed would keep offensive armies from coming in and destroying them. It stood for the reestablishment of the Jewish identity, which the neighbors feared would lead the Jews to a rise to new power.

This was because ancient wars were often fought and lost in front of walled cities. If a city had enough food and water and strong enough walls to withstand a siege you could outlast an attacking army. It was a war of attrition. But if the wall fell that was the end of the battle like at Jericho.



So the neighbors of the returning Jews were in great fear of the Jews reestablishing not only the walls to the city, but its national capital and religion with the rebuilding of the Temple.

And so the opposition was intense and the fear on the part of the Jews was very real. Nehemiah 4:16-18 reads, *“From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor.*

The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah who were building the wall.

Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked.

But the man who sounded the trumpet stayed with me.”

These verses are actually what are depicted in the background screen for today.



Everyone who builds for the Lord experiences some type of opposition and struggle. Internally we often struggle with the personal financial sacrifice building for God takes. Externally, the world never wants us to succeed.

Now this was such a pivotal event in the life of the Jewish faith that there are 5 books in the OT devoted to it. **Ezra and Nehemiah** tell the story of the rebuilding of the Temple (the 2nd Temple or Zerubbabel's Temple) and Jerusalem and its walls. The books of **Haggai and Zechariah** are these prophets encouragement to rebuild the temple and the walls. (That's Haggai, not 'you guys')

The book of **Malachi** is a very strongly worded admonition to the priests and the people to properly worship and respect God in terms of the sacrifices, the tithes and offerings and the proper attitude of the priests towards their duties.

Now **Nehemiah** was “**the cupbearer for the king.**” In that he worked in the King and Queen’s presence it was the custom that he would have been a eunuch. We all must give up somethings for our jobs. Now he didn’t just carry the king’s wine cup around.



James J. Tissot 1836-1902

His job was to taste the wine or water or whatever was in the cup before the king would take a drink to make sure the cup wasn’t poisoned. His duty was die, or get sick, and not the king. His job did not have great retirement benefits.

Nehemiah though was a man whose heart was grieved over the state of Jerusalem that the Exiles returned to. The report came to him that “**The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.**” His response was to weep and mourn, fast a pray.



In a few weeks we will again see a man weeping over the future state of the city of Jerusalem and that man will be Jesus.

Anyway Nehemiah went before the King in a sad state and the king asked him what was wrong. When Nehemiah told the King about the sad state of Jerusalem he was sent to Jerusalem to fix the situation.

Now the amazing thing about Nehemiah was that he was a gifted leader. He inspired the Jews both within Jerusalem and in the surrounding territory to rebuild the walls, reclaim their identity and work as they were able. Now I want to quickly walk you through what the Jews did, and who did it, to show that everyone worked as they were able.

Now depending on whether you are a visual or literal learning turn to page 3 in your bulletin to follow the verses, or if you are a visual learner turn to page 7, and look at the map starting at the top then go down the left side and follow the wall.



The work began with the spiritual leadership. Verse 1 reads, **“Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate.”** It was very appropriate for they were the shepherds of the people.

Next men came from other towns to help. The first mentioned is Jericho which is about a day’s walk from Jerusalem. This you see in verse 2. Next there were many families that did their work starting with **the Fish Gate by the sons of Hassenaah.**

Now not everyone did their fair share. They didn’t all work as they were able. Some were slackers. They worked but didn’t put their shoulders to the work. Verse 5 reads, **“The next section was repaired by the men of Tekoa, but their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work...”** How would you like to be known forever in the Bible as a slacker?

Then there were people from various administrative districts gathered together finally under the title, **“placed under the authority of the governor of the Trans-Euphrates.”**

Then the guilds or tradesmen were listed: **goldsmiths, and perfumers** in verse 8. Even the daughters got into the act. Not only sons, but daughters did the backbreaking work of building the stone walls of Jerusalem. Verse 12 reads, **“Shallum son of Hallohesh, ruler of**

a half-district of Jerusalem, repaired the next section with the help of his daughters.”

Finally, we work all the way around to the bottom of the city to the Dung gate. Yes that gate was used for removing just what it was named for and yes, it was at the bottom of the city.

What is impressive about this list that goes on for 32 verse is that **all contributed and worked as they were able.** **Hanun and residents of Zanoah repaired 1800 feet of the wall.** They worked together and gave a common gift. One guy you can read about in the rest of the chapter only repaired the section of the wall beside his house. Many repaired the wall in front of their house, for who wants to be the place where invaders would enter. Some repaired gates. Some repaired towers.

All as they were able, but the nobles from Tekoa.

There were 47 individuals, groups and families mentioned. There were 3 guilds: goldsmiths, perfumers and merchants. Nine Jewish cities in the area sent their people to work.

The rebuilding of the wall began with the leadership Eliashib the high priest along with the other priests. All segments of the community supported the building and completed it.

1 Corinthians 12:7 says this, **“To each has been given a gift of the Spirit for the good of all.”** Remember, **“Not by strength, nor by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord...”**

In a building finance campaign the first dollar is as important as the last dollar. The major gifts are as important as the smaller gifts, because it takes every dollar given to get the job done.

Ever try to buy a \$100 item with only \$98 cash? It doesn't work. You may only be \$2 short but you are short.

If you got your letter and brochure on the New Vistas' building campaign you know our first gift was for \$150,000. And now after 8 initial gifts we have over \$350,000 given and pledged of the \$1.5million needed for Phase One. Can we give God a great Amen!

This is a different sort of financial campaign. It is mostly face to face discussions answering. Just like our scripture today it began with the leadership our Building Committee and Church Council. It is now spreading out to the rest of the congregation. In some ways it is very slow but boy-o-boy is it effective because it is **“Not by strength, nor by power but by the Spirit of the Lord.”**

More is coming with prayerfully a challenge gift announced on Easter Sunday for those who are yet to make a commitment. We are having a Tutorial by our Financial Consultant Clyde Kunz on April 8th. He will deal a lot with “Charitable IRA Rollovers” as well as other creative ways to give.

My friends, eventually there will be another list created like the one we read in Nehemiah today for our building project here. I pray that your name is on it and you have given as you are able.

For some they will be like Hanun and the residents of Zanoah, whoever heard of them? But they gave the largest gift of all listed in our reading today. For some for this building campaign, it will be, the largest charitable gift you have every given.

“For to each one is given a gift of the Spirit for the good of all.”

What gifts and talents do you have will share for the common good of the Kingdom of God here at Vista Church?

In Jesus' name Amen.