

“And Next to Him”

Nehemiah 3

Although we won't read all of this chapter in this service, I would recommend you take the time to do so. There is a fair amount of history here relating to the portions of the walls and gates mentioned that were repaired, and the people named that were involved in the building. Even though it is not the point of this message to go into detail on this history, one thing it shows is that God is interested in who we are individually, who our family is, where we live, and what needs to be done to better our situation in life.

The English word “next” is found 15 times in this chapter. The English word “after” is found 16 times. Both of these words point to the fact that they all worked together, in their respective places, to get the job done.

For the church today, are we working “next” to anybody? For too many, they want the glory that comes from doing things that put the light on themselves, rather than working together as a unit. For others, as we will see in one instance in this chapter, they don't want any part in the work – just the result. As we noted in the last message from Nehemiah, if you don't put any effort into it, if you don't invest anything in it, then you don't really have a right to complain; nor do you have a right to any success.

Verse one mentions that the high priest (Eliashib) and the other (lesser) priests “sanctified” their portion of the wall, in what appears to be a symbol of the consecration of the entire project to the Lord. They were the first ones mentioned and the work

seemed to emanate from there. The sheep gate was the common entrance to the Temple court area and would have been the logical place to begin the work, and the logical place and time to consecrate the work to the Lord.

This shows that even the “secular” work we do ought to be done for the Lord, and His glory. All we do ought to be dedicated to Him.

I. THE PEOPLE TOOK CARE OF THEIR OWN NEIGHBORHOOD – VS. 1, 28, 29, 30

A. Keep in mind, this is something they should have done immediately upon their return to Jerusalem from captivity, but for whatever reason, they had chosen to build their own homes without much regard for their greater neighborhood – neither its safety and security, nor its physical condition.

B. Now, upon Nehemiah’s arrival and motivation, they see the shape they are actually in and choose to do something about it, in a very real, physical, tangible way.

C. There is a spiritual application to be made here along those same lines. As we have seen in the first two chapters of this book, recognizing the need is the first step in making a difference. Even in salvation, one must first recognize they are a sinner before they will realize they need a Savior. If we don’t recognize the need for spiritual renewal in the church, and in the life of the believer, as well as the spiritual need of the lost, we will be

like the inhabitants of Jerusalem in Nehemiah's day – living in the heaps of the rubbish that is all around us without much regard for change.

D. Vs. 28 shows us that the priests repaired the walls "every one over against his house."

1. The word for "over against" (תָּאָחַז) is one that means either in front of, or opposite of – the section of wall they were rebuilding was that closest to their home.
2. The priests and Levites had no physical inheritance in Israel – their inheritance was the Lord. They were given portions in cities for their homes – in this case, these homes would have been aligned along a specific section of the wall closest to the Temple grounds.

Numbers 18:20

²⁰ And the LORD spake unto Aaron, Thou shalt have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them: I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel.

Deuteronomy 10:9

⁹ Wherefore Levi hath no part nor inheritance with his brethren; the LORD is his inheritance, according as the LORD thy God promised him.

E. Vs. 29 and 30 say something similar about other families – "over against his house" and "over against his chamber." In the case of the latter, the "chamber" wasn't an entire house but simply a room

designated for living quarters in a building that was either used for other purposes or one with multiple "chambers."

II. EACH FAMILY HAD A SPECIFIC PORTION TO DO – ALL WERE INVOLVED, EVEN THE WOMEN – VS. 12

A. *This is seen in the numerous verses that use the phrase "and next unto him," or "and after him," in their various forms. The names given are not just given by coincidence; rather, they are given for a purpose, and that is, in part, to show that God both cares about us individually, as well as expecting each of us to do our part for the care and concern of others.*

B. *Even in a male-dominated society as would have existed at that time in ancient world history, God never left the women out of the work needing done nor the responsibility to get and stay involved. He also didn't leave them out of the rewards that were there for following Him. Yes, they had then, as they do now, have a specific role to play in society that has never changed, but to say they have no voice is wrong.*

C. *To apply this spiritually, consider the church today, and the role that all must play, including, and especially women. If it weren't for the women in the early church, we wouldn't have the church as it is today.*

III. SOME WORKED OUTSIDE THEIR "COMFORT

ZONE" – vs. 1, 32

A. Vs. 1 – the high priest and the lesser priests – this was not a common trade for them.

B. Vs. 32 – the goldsmiths and the merchants – again, not a common trade for them either.

C. In times of national disasters, or catastrophic weather events, we may not be educated engineers, or trained rescue workers, but we can all do something to help. If nothing else, we can give money to help those that can physically help.

D. In the case in Nehemiah, the priests, including the high priest, who would have been trained in matters of the Levitical Law (in the case of the theocracy of the Old Testament, this would have made them lawyers and politicians), took their "suits" off and put on work clothes and got to work.

E. In the spiritual application of this, relating it to the church and the work of the church, it is necessary for each of us, including the senior leadership of any church, to take our "suit" off and put on work clothes and help in the work needing done.

1. Let this be said – this is not the primary job of the pastor, any more than it was the high priest in Nehemiah's day. He was simply one man among many doing the work.

2. Nowhere in Scripture, and nowhere, really, in the history of the church, is the physical work that needs done to be done by just one or two. It has been, and still is, to be done by the many. This is found throughout the Bible. The last chapter of the book of Romans is a good illustration of this. It also shows what God thinks of those that don't do what they're supposed to do.

Romans 16:1-5

¹ I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea:

² That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also.

³ Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus:

⁴ Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.

⁵ Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Salute my wellbeloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ.

Romans 16:17-19

¹⁷ Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.

¹⁸ For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

¹⁹ For your obedience is come abroad unto all men. I am glad therefore on your behalf: but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil.

IV. SOME, HOWEVER, THOUGHT THEY WERE TOO GOOD FOR THE MANUAL LABOR – VS. 5

A. How sad it is when some think it's beneath them to help in time of need. To consider a "third-world country" to be of so little consequence that we don't help them is certainly not in line with the overwhelming mandate of Scripture.

B. The Tekoites were from a region known as Tekoah (modern Tekoah) in the south of Judah, six miles from Bethlehem.

C. "Their nobles" – rulers or royalty, or both (which is most likely the case here).

1. "The rich and mighty would not obey those who were appointed officers in this work, neither would they help them" (Geneva Bible notes).

How sad it is in churches that have well-to-do people that feel it beneath them to physically get involved.

2. It could very well be that these aligned themselves with the enemies (Sanballat and Tobiah) of the work and they didn't want to cross them by helping.

D. "Put not their necks to the work" – "according to Jer. 27:11, to be understood as meaning: to bring the

neck under the yoke of any one, i.e., to subject oneself to the service of another” (K&D). These nobles were so arrogant as to think themselves far above the likes of anyone, including Nehemiah. They weren’t going to lower themselves to the level of basic workers.

Applied spiritually, as to the last point, the leadership of a church that won’t physically do anything because it’s beneath them is certainly not inline with Scripture.

E. “The work of their Lord”

1. Notice that the word “Lord” is not all capitals – it’s not YAHWEH – the Great I Am – it is יְיָ , common word meaning lord or master, and is used for both a human master or the Lord Himself. It’s a word that indicates ownership.
2. *“Of their Lord — Of God, whom they owned for their Lord, whose work this was, because it had proceeded thus far by his singular providence; and because it was done for the defence of the city, and people, and temple of God. And therefore they are branded to all posterity. Let not nobles think any thing beneath them, by which they may benefit their country. What is their nobility good for, but that it places them in a higher and larger sphere of usefulness?” (Joseph Benson)*

Conclusion: What are we doing to help our neighbors and our neighborhood – both physically and spiritually.