

Side by Side—Working together
Nehemiah 3:1-32

Intro: Every once in a while you come across one of those chapters in the Bible that looks like a linguistic obstacle course!—verse after verse of unpronounceable names and places. Sometimes we are tempted to skip over them and move on to the next one. After all there couldn't be much useful to be gained from a chapter like that. Right? Wrong! If we did that with Nehemiah chapter three we would miss some powerful and valuable lessons on building for God!

Last week we talked about the importance of great leadership and we considered Nehemiah as an example of a great leader who motivated the people to say, "Let us arise and build" (Neh. 2:18). Consequently he describes their efforts in a single sentence: "So they put their hands to the good work". Here in Nehemiah 3 we see an insightful explanation of those 9 powerful words". So let's take a closer look at this chapter in a lesson I've called "Side by side—working together".

Ordinarily I've been reading the text; but let me due to the length and the difficult names, I'll simply summarize the action of this chapter. Nehemiah is giving a detailed account of the rebuilding and repair of the walls and gates around the city. Most of them have names that relate to the activity taking place around them. For example, the sheep gate (near the temple) would be the place through which the priest brought sheep from the fields into the temple precincts for daily offering. The fish gate probably marks a place where a market for fish was found, etc. Nehemiah with great detail takes us around the city in circular fashion showing how the cooperative effort of the people resulted in a successful restoration of the walls. And it teaches us a valuable lesson about teamwork!

If, on the one hand, we see that great works for God depend upon great leadership, we can see, on the other hand, that great works for God depend upon great follow-ship! No leader, however great, can accomplish what all the people can do when they work together! In fact, without follow-ship, leadership doesn't exist! So let's spend some time thinking about the features of great followers!

Great followers have a willingness to do great things for God!

There are at least five ingredients necessary for any successful work!

A Noble Purpose

A Clear Plan

A Willing People

A Burning Passion

A Tenacious Persistence

Nehemiah led a willing people: "So they put their hands to the good work" (2:20)

The local church is not an organization for “superstars”. It is a team that depends upon the willingness of all its members to see the good things leaders set before them and work to accomplish them. No elder, deacon, preacher, or Bible class teacher has the power to build a church by his own efforts.

“He who professes to lead but has no one following is only out for a walk”.

Great followers recognize that and demonstrate a willingness to work for God!

Great followers work side by side with other followers!

Nehemiah three gives us a vivid picture of the details of the work.

In total there were ten different gates mentioned in the repairing of the wall. Some forty sections of the wall are mentioned, showing Nehemiah’s careful detailed planning of the project. Archaeologists have found that some parts of the rebuilt wall were as thick as eight feet. Since breaking down a gate was easier than destroying a piece of the wall, areas around the gates needed special repair and reinforcement.

Notice the frequent use of the expression, “Next to”! The idea here is that the people worked together—not just in the same place, but in cooperation. Men and women, artisans and laborers, princes and commoners, all labored side by side. Each one was focused on the task given to them!

It shows us how works of great magnitude are accomplished in “pieces”. No one did it all; but everyone working side by side built his “piece” of the project.

The success of God’s work today also depends upon this “side by side” mentality.

Once we have big picture view of what we want to do, then everyone has put in their “piece” of the wall!

Every Christian has to connect with the vision of Ephesians 4 that describes the church as a body “being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies!”

Great followers learn to do what they may not be used to doing!!

In chapter three there is one blight on a perfect record of cooperation and unity. The nobles of Tekoa shirked their responsibility (v. 5).

Did they think they were above getting their hands dirty?

Was it because they were so used to telling others what to do, that they thought it beneath them to dig in the rubble?

Were they so used to telling others what to do, that they thought it beneath them to work like everyone else?

Know this, that God knows those who really do work for Him and those who pretend to be interested and do very little for Him.

What is especially encouraging is how people who had limited strength and experience in wall building responded to the challenge.

Notice how people with little talent in the area of brick masonry got involved.

Priests (v. 1-2)

Apothecaries & goldsmiths (3:8)

One man didn't have sons to carry out the hard labor of moving the debris. So his daughters participated in the rebuilding of the walls! (3:12)

Those without masonry skill didn't opt out because of a lack of "talent".

It is amazing how quickly we dismiss improvement or growth by the protest of a lack of talent! And I don't know where people get this crazy notion that everyone who is accomplished at something just kind of woke up one day and put it on autopilot and started doing something great. The music from the musician just started flowing from his fingers, the lessons and sermons of the teachers and preachers just started with the tapping of the type-writer. When will we see that all spiritual accomplishment is like my trumpet teacher once told me about success in the music business: 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration!

Great followers build with enthusiasm!

Notice the remark about Baruch!

(Heb. *harah*) (3:20) The Hebrew verb translated *carefully* here usually means "to burn with anger" (Gen. 39:19; Jon. 4:1) and depicts anger as a burning fire. In the present passage, the word denotes burning with zeal, not anger. In other words, Baruch earnestly wanted to repair the walls of Jerusalem because he knew it was God's city and God's work. His repairs were for the glory of the living Lord.

Some of the builders having finished their job went to work somewhere else! (v. cf. 4 & 21; v. & 27) There was no "I've done my part and I'm not doing any more!" Instead great followers are tireless workers who don't compare what they do with others. If they have greater skill or efficiency, they just use it to do more for God!

Jesus complaint about the church at Laodicea was not that they had no talent nor that they didn't know the truth. They just didn't have any passion! "I just wish were you cold or hot!" Enthusiasm is contagious! Great followers ignite others with their infectious enthusiasm.

Great followers deserve credit for the work they do!

In the first three chapters the emphasis is upon the leader; but in this chapter the emphasis is on the followers. Nehemiah is not mentioned one time in the whole chapter, but the people are named. The people built the wall, and they worked as hard as they said they would (2:18).

Nehemiah showed himself to be a great leader by acknowledging and approving the work of ordinary people! The Holy Spirit made sure that we knew the names of these people we otherwise would have never known had it not been for their willingness to help do God's work!

Let this be an encouragement to you! God knows who you are and He knows every contribution you make. He will reward you for every thing you do for Him! We have some great followers here, people just like the kind we read about in Nehemiah. We can't give too much credit to the people on whose shoulders the work of God is carried.

Conclusion: Some people are constructionists, helping to get the job done. Others are destructionists, busy tearing things down. A third group is made up of obstructionists who create problems for the people doing the work. In which group are you?

Can we count on you to exercise your influence and leadership where you can? And can we count on you to be a team player in following the leadership of others? If we can, then the best days of Perry Heights are yet to come!