

Series: rebuild

July 1, 2018

Title: Time to Rebuild

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Text: Nehemiah 2

Vision

Jerusalem:

Nehemiah was a man with a vision: to rebuild a destroyed city and its society.

In the ancient world the City was seen as the greatest accomplishment of a civilization. It stood as a place of order and safety in a chaotic and unpredictable world. A city provided everything people needed in order to both survive and thrive: protection, food, water, employment, commerce, art, entertainment. The city was seen as the earthly home of the gods.

No wonder, then, that when a conquering general wanted to make his point, he leveled the city to the ground. No city, no society.

This is what had happened to the city of Jerusalem. The Babylonians had conquered and leveled the city in 587 B.C. Now, 143 years later, Nehemiah had a vision of rebuilding Jerusalem's walls and gates, making a place for a city to rise once again.

Vision:

Like Nehemiah, each one of us has a city to rebuild. Each one of us is a microcosm of the City of God: the place where God has chosen to dwell. We need strong walls to keep out the destructive forces in our world. We need gates that allow the good things in God's Creation to come into our lives.

The most powerful "cities" that we build, however, are built with others: a marriage, a family, a church. Together, we build and strengthen walls. Together we build the gates that lead into our shared space.

One day we will see the fulfillment of the building project. John pictured it as a glorious City: The New Jerusalem:

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Revelation 21:10-12 NIV

And [the angel] carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shown with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

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It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. And on the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.

But the journey from *vision* to *reality* requires that we travel through the Valley of Uncertainty!

The Valley of Uncertainty

A hard dose of reality:

Anyone who has ever undertaken a complicated rebuilding project knows that before you fix things, you need to know exactly what's broken. Vision requires a hard dose of reality if it is ever to become a new reality.

Nehemiah tells us that the first thing he did after arriving in Jerusalem was to make a night-time inspection of the ruins of Jerusalem:

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Nehemiah 2:11-12 NIV

I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days, 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.

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Before sharing his vision of a rebuilt Jerusalem, Nehemiah gave himself that hard dose of reality. No short cuts here. No pumping up the crowd with short-lived enthusiasm. No tipping his hand to the many enemies in the surrounding territory who were determined that Jerusalem never be rebuilt.

Nehemiah kept his own counsel and went out under cover of night to see things for himself.

What he found were walls that were broken down and gates that had been burned to cinders. He tells us that at one point there was so much rubble he simply couldn't go any further!

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Nehemiah 2:14-15 NIV

Then I moved on to the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there wasn't enough room for my mount to get through; so I went up the valley by night examining the wall. Finally, I turned back and reentered through the Valley Gate.

The Valley of Uncertainty:

Having walked by night in the Valley of Uncertainty, Nehemiah was now ready to lead a discouraged and beaten-down people on the journey to rebuilding Jerusalem:

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Nehemiah 2:16-18 NIV

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.

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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."

I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me.

Nehemiah's message was simple and to the point:

- The current reality: the city is in ruins
- The vision: Let's fix this!
- God's empowerment: God has opened the way.

For the leaders and people of Jerusalem, living in ruins was the “new normal.” They had never known any other reality. To even *dream* of rebuilding launched them into the Valley of Uncertainty. How could they ever tackle such a project? How would their enemies retaliate? What would the King of Persia think of such a bold move?

Nehemiah had an answer for each twist and turn of the Valley of Uncertainty. It was time to rebuild!

Time to Rebuild

Beginning the “good work”

When Nehemiah finished speaking, the people of Jerusalem rose to the challenge:

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Nehemiah 2:18b NIV

They replied, “Let us start rebuilding.” So they began this good work.

Good Work: Do you hear an echo of the great Creation Story in Genesis? Creation was God’s work, and He declared that it was *good*. Now it was time to restore a crown jewel in God’s Creation. It was time to rebuild. And rebuilding God’s Good Creation is *Good Work*.

No matter the voices of derision and hate; no matter the slander and false charges that the enemies to the rebuilding brought. Nehemiah put his trust in God alone:

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Nehemiah 2:20 NIV

I answered them by saying, “The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it.”

Time to Rebuild:

We as a church have heard the same call to rebuild. In a few weeks we will be taking out the pews you are sitting on this morning. We’ll tear up the

worn out carpet, and then spend a month or more in the Valley of Uncertainty!

But there are gates to be rebuilt as well. In my own "nighttime" inspections I have come to see ways in which we can make our little "city" inviting and welcoming to many more people. What are these gates?

- The Gate of Hospitality
- The Gate of Worship
- The Gate of Family Ministries

No one person can rebuild these gates for a new time and a new generation. But together, we will build a new, fresh place where we meet God and welcome those He is drawing into His kingdom.

So, what do you say? Let's start rebuilding!!