

## **Rise And Build 2017**

Welcome to the first Sunday, the first day of the new year, 2017. I like the freshness of a new year, a new beginning, new possibilities. The Scripture speaks of old things having passed away and all things being made new in Christ. I like to think that is the case for us as we leave one year behind and begin a new year.

This year is going to be different, exciting, challenging as we begin the remodeling of our facility. It's going to be wonderful when it's finished and it's going to be challenging while it's being built. This physical remodel is going to serve as the backdrop for our emphasis, our theme this year. Rise and Build. It is a wonderful metaphor for what I believe God wants to do in our hearts, our lives, our marriages, our families, our businesses, our relationships. Yes, we are going to build a physical building during 2017, but more than that, I want us to commit to building our lives according to God's design and order.

When you think about it, the bible is a story of builders. God's people building a civilization, a nation (the nation of Israel). It is a story of God's people rebuilding after attack and exile, rebuilding, by God's grace and mercy, after sin brought destruction and pain. It is a story of building by faith, building the church, building a community of people living according to the truths of God's word. It is a story of God's people endeavoring to build their lives, their character, their decisions according to God's word, God's design, God's order and it has always been a story of God's people building together. That too was and is part of God's design and plan. We are doing this together. That's why one of the New Testament metaphors or pictures of the church is the body of Christ, every part contributing to make the body work effectively and efficiently. We are building together.

It is going to take all of us working together to build the new facilities. I'm not ashamed to ask for your help, your financial help and sacrifice to build because I believe we are acting in obedience to the Lord. I believe we are building for today but perhaps more importantly I believe we are building for the future, building so the next generation, the next leadership will have tools in hand to do even greater things for God and for this community. I really believe that and because of that, I want to sow into what God is doing!

The last Sunday of the month, January 29<sup>th</sup> we are going to receive a special offering and receive pledges for our building project. I am asking everyone to pray and ask the Lord what He would have you give toward the building. I am believing God for a miracle offering and for

generous pledges that day. Some of you will be able to give a cash offering. Others will be able to make a pledge to give an amount weekly or monthly, but however you are able to do it, however God leads you to give, I believe God will bless you and enable you. I challenge everyone to give to see this happen. It's going to be an exciting day and an exciting year!

As important as that Sunday is and as important as being able to pay the bills and build our building, that's not as important as our building godly lives and godly families. If we raise enough money to build the building without borrowing a penny but we don't build godly lives and godly families, we haven't accomplished a thing! I want to challenge you to give and to rise up and build this building because I believe this is what we are supposed to do, but more than that I want to challenge you this morning to rise up and build the life God has for you, the life to which he is calling you!

Turn with me to the Old Testament book of Nehemiah. There are some truths here I want us to consider over the next couple of weeks. Some quick background. The city of Jerusalem had been captured and destroyed by the armies of Babylon in 586 B.C. The temple of God was destroyed, the city walls were torn down, the gates were burned and the majority of the people were exiled, carried off as captives and slaves to Babylon. About fifty years later the Babylonians were conquered by the Persians and the new Persian king, Cyrus, allowed some of the Jews to return to their homeland. This first return is described in the book of Ezra, led by a Jewish guy born in Babylonian captivity by the name of Zerubbabel. They manage to get the temple rebuilt, but that's about it. Another fifty or sixty years go by and another wave of Jewish exiles are allowed to return under the leadership of Ezra. He re-establishes the law, the Torah, as the basis for Israel's society and calls for a spiritual renewal in the hearts of the people. Finally, a third return of Jews from Babylon occurs around 444 B. C. and this one is led by Nehemiah.

Nehemiah is described as the cupbearer to the king of Persia. He is actually kind of the chief of staff for the king, a position of influence. But he hears the word from home that after 150 years the walls of Jerusalem are still lying in rubble and the gates are still burned and destroyed. This is supposed to be the city of God. It is supposed to be a reflection of the splendor of the God of Israel and yet it stands as a reproach. He is broken hearted at the news.

The king notices he is not himself and inquires as to the problem. Nehemiah tells him about his home in Jerusalem and asks for permission to go to the city where his ancestors are buried in order to rebuild it. King Artaxerxes grants Nehemiah permission to return to Jerusalem

to build the walls, sending along an armed escort, papers providing safe passage and resources to help get the job done. When Nehemiah arrives he secretly, quietly inspects the walls and gates without telling anyone his purpose or his plans. Let's read from Nehemiah 2:11. **"I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days I set out during the night with a few men. 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."** Nehemiah 2:11-12

Nehemiah tells of riding around the city, examining each of the city gates which were destroyed. Finally, he calls the city officials and leaders together and says, **"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 upon me and what the king had said to me. They replied, 'Let us start rebuilding.' So they began this good work."** Nehemiah 2:17-18

The people agreed this was the right thing to do. It sounds crazy doesn't it, that 150 years had gone by and the people hadn't bothered to rebuild the walls and the gates of Jerusalem. I get it that people had returned to their own cities and not just Jerusalem. They came to Jerusalem for the feasts and sacrifices, but at the same time, this was the city where God instructed them to build the temple. This was their city and that means their reputation was tied to this city. Nehemiah grieved because he felt God's reputation was tied to this city as well. "Let's rebuild the walls so we will no longer be in disgrace" he said. Why hadn't they done something about their situation? Why hadn't they rebuilt? I suppose they had come up with all kinds of reasons and excuses, kind of like we do. "No money, no resources. We couldn't afford to rebuild." I'm sure the people were trying to rebuild their own homes and farms and businesses. They figured they didn't have time or money to give to rebuild the temple or rebuild the city walls. Maybe it just didn't seem that important to them. Perhaps it was just the way things were in Jerusalem. You know how you do over a period of time, how you settle for the way things are? "What do you mean rebuild the walls? There should be walls and gates? For 150 years there has only been rubble. There have never been real gates or real walls. Why change now? You just learn to accept things. You learn to go along with the rubble, the destruction."

We do it in our own lives. We accept the defeat, the sin, the compromise in our own lives. "That's just the way things are in my life. That's just how I am. That's just how we communicate, screaming and swearing at each other. That's just how it is. I work three jobs and

he stays home and plays video games. That's just how it is, he cheats on me but at least I have a man. That's just how it is, I go to church but I lie and cheat and sleep around. That's just how it is. I'm an addict and I can't change." I don't know, the list can go on, but the point is, a lot of us are living with gates burned and the walls down in our life. We are living with the rubble, settling for less than God's best, God's pattern, God's design. We've settled for compromise. We've settled for sin, deciding that's just the way it is in our lives, like the rubble of Jerusalem was just the way it was for those people. But Nehemiah came along to tell them they didn't have to settle anymore. God sent him to Jerusalem to tell the people they could build something new, something better, a new life. God sent him to tell them they didn't have to settle for compromise and for less than God's best in their lives.

God sent me to tell you you don't have to live in the rubble of your past, the rubble of a life of sin and bad choices. God wants to see the walls of self-control and discipline and holiness rebuilt in your life. God has something new and better for you, for all of us. Will you dare to believe me today? Will you dare to believe God, that you don't have to settle for sin and destruction and rubble in your life anymore?

Why hadn't they rebuilt the walls and gates? I don't know, but why haven't you rebuilt the walls and gates of your life? Why haven't I rebuilt the places in my life where my defenses are down? You see, when the walls are down in our lives, we are defenseless to the enemy's attack. We are vulnerable to temptation and to the lies of the devil. Why haven't we rebuilt the walls?

Did someone convince you you couldn't? Did the devil convince you that was just how things were to be in your life? When we read on in Nehemiah we see the enemies of God's people show up as soon as word got out that they were going to rebuild the walls. Nehemiah wrote, **"But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us. 'What is this you are doing?' they asked. 'Are you rebelling against the king?'"** Nehemiah 2:19

"Who do you think you are? Do you really believe you can rebuild the walls? Do you believe you can rebel against the way things have always been in your life?" In chapter 4 Sanballat says **"What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble – burned as they are?"** Nehemiah 4:2

There will be enemies that will look at you and say, “Who told you you could rebuild your life? Who told you you could get sober, you could stay sober? Who told you you could get your life straightened out? Who told you you could work out your marriage problems? Who told you you could change? Who told you you could raise a couple million dollars to rebuild and remodel this church in this economy? You can’t do this! You can’t change! You can’t bring something that is dead back to life. You can’t! You can’t! You can’t!

Listen to what Nehemiah told Sanballat. **“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.” Nehemiah 2:20**

I’ve come to tell you can! It’s time to build. The time is now. Stop believing what you can’t do and let me tell you what God says you can do. Philippians 4:13 says you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. It is time for you to rise and build. It is time for you to rebuild what has been torn down and burned and destroyed in your life. It is time for you to stop settling for the rubble that past sins and mistakes and bad choices have brought into your life. It is time to ask for God’s help. Repent and turn to God and start cleaning up the rubble and building a new life, building on God’s plans, God’s design, God’s order, with God’s help.

I’ve come to tell you that what the enemy told you couldn’t be done, can be done. With man it’s impossible but with God all things are possible. I’ve come to tell you that the God of heaven will give you success if you will step out in faith and build. I believe God will help us raise the money and build this building. I believe this is God’s time for us, for this church. We are supposed to do this and he will give us success if we will sacrifice and trust him and give.

Hear Nehemiah’s words again. **“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.”**

You see the trouble you are in. You see the need. You see the problems. **Let us rise and build!** We will put the disgrace of the past behind us. We will build and we will see the glory of God. Rise and build, not just out of the rubble of compromise or sin. God calls us to rise and build out of failure, out of betrayal, out of grief and tragedy. It is time to rise and build. Build and let God redeem the pain and the heartbreak. He will help you and you can build again. You can do this because God is with you, God is with us, and he will grant us success.

Still wondering how you can do this? Remember that first guy that came back with the exiles to start to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple? Zerubbabel? The prophet Zechariah spoke to him. It looked pretty overwhelming. Jerusalem looked much worse than when Nehemiah saw it almost 150 years later. How would he be able to rebuild? Here is what the Lord said to him.

**“This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit’, says the Lord Almighty. What are you, O mighty mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become level ground.” Zechariah 4:6-7**

That mountain that looks so great before you, that mound of rubble that just seems impossible to clear away, by the Spirit of the Lord it becomes level ground. That part of your life that seems too much to even think about rebuilding, don't worry. God will give you success!

**Let us rise and build!**