

Rise and Build Part 3

Two weeks from today we are going to launch our Rise and Build capital campaign. I'm excited about the building project, excited about what we are going to be able to do with new facilities and new technology and a new look. To be honest, I'm excited about the opportunity to be able to give and invest in the vision God has given us for the future.

Seventeen years ago we were meeting in VBI, displaced because of the tornado, and I was preaching on faith and giving. I had given copies of E.M.Clark's book "How to Be Happy and Give Your Money Away" to every family in the church to read. He challenged us in the book to break our giving barriers. He said people have a certain amount they give and they just don't ever think they can give more than that. He said we have to take a step of faith and break those giving barriers. Paula and I, and I think a lot of us, broke our self-imposed giving barriers as we gave to the building fund and I can't begin to tell you how God blessed and provided for us. The church gave, money came from unexpected sources and we built and moved in debt free! I don't know if that will happen again, but I'm excited to be able to give because I believe this is obedience and because I know I can trust God to supply and provide as we obey and give.

We are two weeks away so let me ask your help. I am asking all of us to do three things. First of all: **Pray!** I want us to pray for God's direction. Pray for God's favor upon the building project itself and upon our fund raising. Pray for favor with the city so we can get the building permit granted (they asked for some additional information which the architect has supplied) and we can get started. Pray and ask the Lord what he would have you do. You may have an amount you planned to give but when you pray about it, the Lord may challenge you to break a giving barrier and give a different amount. I'm not telling you what to do, I'm just asking you to pray and seek the Lord's direction. Ask for increased faith to trust and obey. Ask the Lord for creative ideas on how to be able to give above your tithes to the building fund. Years ago the ladies would make donuts to sell or fried pies. Maybe there is something you can make and sell to be able to have money to give. I don't know what you can do, but I believe if you will pray the Lord will direct you and I know he will bless you as you give to the work of his church!

Second, I'm asking you to **Prepare to give.** After you pray and get direction from the Lord, I want you to prepare your heart to give. Give with excitement and expectation. Give believing the Lord will honor and bless your giving, giving back to you in unexpected ways. Also, preparing to give may mean moving money out of savings into checking, or selling your

comic book collection so you can give, or selling that car you always meant to restore that has been setting in the garage all these years and that guy keeps asking if you are ready to sell it...prepare to give. When the tornado hit, Gerald and Mary Lou Mattox were retired and on a fixed income. Gerald wanted to give so he took a job servicing vending machines so he could have money to give to the building fund. He worked until he paid off his pledge. I don't know what it means to you, but prepare your heart and prepare your finances so you can give.

Finally, I am asking us to **Plant in Faith**. I wouldn't be asking us to give if I didn't think we are doing the right thing and obeying the Lord. I wouldn't be asking you to give if I wasn't planning to give. You know I'm an ORU grad and Oral taught us about seed faith, about planting, sowing and reaping. I believe we are planting seed into good soil when we give to this project. That's what your gift, your giving is – a seed you are planting into good soil and that seed will produce a harvest. I can't tell you what that harvest will be or what it will look like. I believe the Lord will multiply blessings back to you that may include financial blessings and provision. He did for us 17 years ago. More importantly, I believe because we are giving to his church, I believe the harvest will be in lives saved and changed and transformed and we will all have a part in that. I believe there will be new harvest fields reached through the use of upgraded technology. I believe there will be new people coming and growth will come to the church in a variety of ways because we dare to give and grow and sow these seeds.

I know it may be scary. And I know for some, the timing seems bad. You just had a major change in your life – a new baby, a new house, retirement. But God is still faithful and if we pray, obey and trust him, he will provide. I believe it. Besides, if it isn't a little scary we probably aren't doing it right! We probably aren't walking by faith if we aren't a little frightened. Don't be afraid to give in bold faith to God's work and trust him.

Two weeks from today, we will have an opportunity to give in a cash offering and we will have an opportunity to pledge to give over a one, two or three year period. You can give part now and the rest over time. Everyone can do something. It isn't equal giving but equal sacrifice as we give to see the need met. **Pray, Prepare, Plant. Trust and obey and God will make a way. It's time to Rise and Build!** Let's pray and ask for the Lord's direction and help!

Turn again this week to the book of Nehemiah. One hundred and fifty years have gone by since Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians. The temple has been rebuilt, families have returned, commerce is returning, but the walls still lay in piles of rubble and the gates are

burned. Nehemiah returns to challenge the people to repair the walls and rebuild the gates so they will no longer be in disgrace. The people accepted the challenge. Nehemiah reports the people's response. **"Let us arise and build. So they put their hands to the good work."**

Nehemiah 2:18 There were three things they had to deal with that we need to deal with as well: rubble, walls and gates.

I want us to consider Nehemiah's story as a metaphor for our spiritual condition today. The temple had been rebuilt and worship had begun again, but there was still rubble, the walls were down and the gates were destroyed. Consider that as a metaphor, a picture of our spiritual condition. We have been born again through our faith in Christ. We repented of our sins and he lives in our heart now. In that sense the temple has been rebuilt and worship has begun. We are here this morning worshiping the Lord. But, what about the rubble, the walls and the gates?

The rubble in Jerusalem was a result of the destruction that came at the hands of the Babylonians. But the attack from the Babylonians was judgement, the consequence of the sins of the Israelites. God had repeatedly warned them to turn from their sin and obey his word. Instead, they went their own way and eventually, judgement came and left them with rubble, the consequences of their sins.

How many of us are living in or living with the rubble from our past? I realize we have to live with a measure of those consequences. But, it's not just that we live in the rubble of the past, it is that we rehearse the past, we don't try to move on beyond the rubble of the past. We settle for rubble. We wallow in it. We wake up every day and remind ourselves of the rubble and why it's there and how we are victims. "See the rubble kids? We used to live up there on the hill till your daddy tore up everything and left us in this rubble." "We used to be happy till your mother ran off and now we have to live in this rubble." "I had a good life until they lied about me and got me fired, until she betrayed me, until people at church rejected me and ran me off and now all I have is this rubble."

Listen to me, God wants to do more than save you and restore a right relationship with you. He wants you to do more than repair the temple. He wants you to do more than just get saved and go to church. He wants you to move beyond the rubble of a sinful or heartbreaking past. You have repented and made Jesus the Savior and Lord of your life, then stop living in the rubble. Stop being a victim. God intends you to live in his victory rather than in the rubble of your past. Listen to what the apostle Paul writes, **"For if, by the trespass of the one man,**

death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ." Romans 5:17. Because of one man, Adam and his sin, sin's consequences, death and rubble reigned in all of us. But through the grace and sacrifice of one man, Jesus Christ and his abundant provision of grace, we don't have to live in the rubble anymore but we can reign in life through Jesus! Stop living in the rubble of the past. Stop dwelling on it, rehearsing it every day, reminding people of the rubble and how it got there. You are meant to reign in victory in this life through the abundant provision of God's grace. It's time to pick up the stones out of the rubble and rebuild your life with God's help. It's time to rise up and build. Clear away the rubble!

What about the walls? Walls control who and what comes in and goes out of a city. So think about our metaphor. The temple has been rebuilt. You are born again, your spirit has been redeemed and you are living for Jesus but the walls are still down. There is little to control who and what comes in and goes out in your life. If it seems like the devil is constantly tripping you up, if it seems you are so vulnerable to temptation, if it seems you just can't seem to live for Jesus like you desire, perhaps the reason is because the walls are down in your life. It's time to rise and build!

We need walls to guard and protect us. What guards what comes into our life and into our spirit? Let's think of the walls as being our mind, will and our emotions. The bible tells us we aren't supposed to conform to this world, surrendering to its control, instead we are to be transformed by having our mind renewed. We get our mind renewed by knowing God's word. We rebuild the walls by having our mind, our thoughts submitted to Christ. Instead of letting anything come into my life, my mind says, "That's trouble. That's not pleasing to God. That opposes God's word."

Part of the wall that protects us is our will. Our mind tells us the right thing and then our will directs our choice. When our will is redirected in surrender to Jesus, then when the mind says, "don't let that in, that's trouble" our will says, "Stop. You aren't coming in here. We don't allow that into our life or our mind or our body any longer!" Every day we choose to direct our will toward Jesus. Every day we choose to say as Jesus did, "Not my will but your will be done."

Our emotions and feelings are part of that wall. We don't let our feelings and emotions control our choices, instead, our feelings are surrendered in obedience to Christ. Emotions and feelings that led us into compromise and sin are redeemed by the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works in us as we live in obedience. The bible says **“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” Galatians 5:22.** Tell the Lord every day “Lord, I want to cooperate with the Holy Spirit as you produce this kind of fruit in my life. With God's help I will love and forgive and choose to live at peace, I will be patient. With God's help I'll get the walls of my mind, will and emotions rebuilt so I can guard my heart and my spirit, so I can live for Jesus like I should.

The Bible says, **“Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control.” Proverbs 25:28** It's time to rise and rebuild the walls in your life. Without those walls of self-control, we are susceptible to all kinds of addiction and life controlling issues. The devil, the enemy of your soul doesn't want you building a wall and surrendering control of your life to Jesus. Look at Ezra 4. This is a few years before Nehemiah shows up. They start to rebuild the walls when enemies of Israel write to the King of Persia. **“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. Furthermore, the king should know that 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.” Ezra 4:12-13.** In other words, when the walls go up, the enemy loses control!

Listen to me. If you start rebuilding the walls and truly surrendering your life, your mind, will and emotions to Jesus, cooperating with the work of the Holy Spirit to restore self-control, the devil isn't going to like it because he loses control, he loses tribute and revenue. When you decide to build the walls and no longer allow yourself to be controlled by addiction, by gambling, by pornography, by lust, by alcohol or drugs or anger or jealousy or a million other things, the devil isn't going to like it but you will know what it means to reign in this life through Jesus Christ and his redeeming power. You won't regret getting the walls rebuilt in your life!

Finally, what about the gates? In the ancient world the gates of a city represented the center of authority and local government. The Old Testament speaks of the elders sitting at the gates of the city to judge cases, to settle disputes. The kings often sat at the city gates to rule. The gate represented the ruling authority.

For Nehemiah and Jerusalem, with the gates burned there was no real authority ruling the city. Everyone was a ruler and a law to themselves. They did as they pleased. They still showed up at the temple to worship, but they didn't feel the need to obey the law of God since there was no judge, no ruler on the throne at the city gates.

Ezra and Nehemiah attempted to not only rebuild the gates as a symbol of restored authority, but to re-establish the Law, the word of God as the ultimate authority for the people. For us, in our metaphor, the gate represents the seat of authority in our lives. The question is, **Who sits at the gate, who rules on the throne of your life?** You see, someone is calling the shots in your life. Is it you or is it the Lord or is it someone or something else?

We talked about rebuilding the wall of self-control earlier. Are you and Jesus in control of your life or does someone or something else determine how you live and what you serve? Who or what exercises absolute authority and control in your life? What is behind the decisions you make? Is it just what you want, your desire, or is it what God wants, what God desires for you? Do you live by your own set of standards or is the word of God the standard by which you live your life? Who guides and directs the choices and the steps you take in your life?

We need to rebuild the gates and place Jesus at the throne, at the gates of our life. Let his word be the determining factor and the standard in your life and not popular opinion or the desires of your own flesh. Pleasing God and obeying his word should be the ruling authority at the gate of your life.

Rubble blinds you to the future God wants for you. It's time to stop living in the rubble of your past. It's time to rise and build.

A city without walls is like a person without self-control. You need to rebuild the walls in your life. You are susceptible to every attack, every temptation of the enemy, constantly defeated by the enemy. Rebuild the walls of your life, your personality, with a renewed mind and a redirected and refocused will and emotions. It's time to rise and build.

Without gates we don't know who is in control, who holds the reins of authority. Rebuild the gates to your life. Re-establish the gates by re-establishing Jesus upon the throne of your life. Give him the reins of authority in your life. Surrender your heart and life to him and live according to his word. When you do you will find yourself reigning in this life with him, living that abundant life of grace he has called you to live! It's time to rise and build!

