

Rise and Build Part 8

Turn to Nehemiah 7. Nehemiah finished rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem in our sermon last Sunday. You would think that means we are done with this series of messages and that is perhaps what Nehemiah and the people thought. The walls are completed, the gates are set. Our work here is done. But not so fast. Just getting the walls and gates rebuilt is not enough.

We have approached the book of Nehemiah as an accounting of an historical event in the return of the exiles and the rebuilding of the city walls, but also as a metaphor, an allegory for us to learn some important spiritual truths. The temple has been rebuilt and worship restored. We can view that as our salvation and a right relationship with God restored through faith in Christ. The walls have been rebuilt and we've talked about the walls representing self-control and the spiritual disciplines necessary to live a faithful, Christ honoring life. The gates are set in place and we talked about the gates of the city representing the seat of authority. The rulers sat at the gate of the city to judge and rule. We placed Jesus at the gate, upon the throne of our life. But that isn't all there is to it. The wall and gates are completed but the work is not done. In fact, it may be the easy part is finished – the physical labor. Now comes the hard part of living a faithful life for God in the city of Jerusalem, living according to his commandments and his law.

Nehemiah 6:17-19 informs us there were still entangling alliances between many of the people and Tobiah. Remember Tobiah and Sanballat were enemies of Nehemiah that tried to kill him and stop the work. There were still threats to the city and to the people. Tobiah was still trying to intimidate and threaten Nehemiah. It reminds us that once we have surrendered our heart and life to Jesus and placed him upon the throne of our life there is still work to be done. There are still enemies trying to stop you and defeat you. There are still alliances with people, with the world, things that will trip you and drag you down if you aren't careful. **Diligence is required in living for Jesus.** We have to be intentional about living for the Lord. That's what discipleship is all about. Let's look at what Nehemiah does.

“After the wall had been rebuilt and I had set the doors in place, the gatekeepers and the singers and the Levites were appointed.” Nehemiah 7:1 It wasn't enough to have the walls and gates rebuilt, there had to be people to man the gates. Here is an important thing to remember. **A gate is only as good as the character of the gatekeeper.** The gatekeeper controls who and what goes into the city through the gate. If the gatekeeper is asleep on the job, if the gatekeeper can be bribed to let the wrong people and the wrong things in, you're in trouble.

We need gatekeepers to control what comes into our life. The gates to our life and our soul we could easily identify as our mind, our emotions and our senses: our eyes, ears, nose, taste, touch. These are essentially the means by which things enter into our life. So let me ask: **What are you allowing into your life?** Think about the gates to your life. **What are you allowing in through your eyes and ears? (What you watch and listen to.)** Have you positioned adequate and appropriate gatekeepers in your life? Are you allowing negative, corrupting things into your heart, your mind, your spirit, your body? **Who or what are you allowing into your life that influences and controls your choices, your decisions?** What do you allow in that shapes your thinking, your perspective and worldview? Are you as careful about what you put into your mind and spirit as you are about what you put into your body? **Are you allowing things to pass through the gates of your life that weaken your spiritual devotion or harden your heart?** We need gatekeepers in place in our lives.

If we are allowing destructive and negative and fearful thoughts to pass through the gates unhindered, we are going to suffer for it. Think about it: if you spend hours playing violent video games or listening to music with violent or highly sexualized lyrics or watching suggestive and sexual videos, you are allowing enemies to pass through the gates of your life. Paul said in Philippians 4:8 to think on things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy. Would your play list pass that test? Those are the kind of things and thoughts we should allow to pass through the gates of our life. People are worried about who is or isn't coming into our country. I suggest we pay attention to what we are allowing to come into our life, into our mind, our spirit. We need to do some extreme vetting on the things we allow into our life through our eyes and ears. We need gatekeepers in our life to stop them at the gate!

Notice Nehemiah told the gatekeepers, **“The gates of Jerusalem are not to be opened until the sun is hot.” Nehemiah 7:3** Nehemiah made sure the gates weren't opened until everyone was awake, alert, up and going. He wanted to make sure that all of their dealings with people from outside the walls were done in the bright light of day! It's a good plan for us. We need to make sure our life is lived in the light. Get out of the shadows, out of darkness. Think of it this way, **Don't open the gates of your life IN darkness or TO darkness.** Live with the light of accountability shining upon your relationships, upon your choices and actions. The bible says people love darkness because their deeds are evil. **Are you hiding things or behavior from parents, from your spouse, family or friends?** Are you opening the gates of your life in

darkness or to darkness? **Are there things you are allowing into your life right now that you know are having a detrimental effect on you or others?** The apostle Paul writes, **“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light...have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness.” Ephesians 5:8-11** If your choices can't bear the light of day there is a problem. You are letting the wrong stuff through the gates of your life. It's time to put gatekeepers in place in your life and have nothing to do with darkness.

Nehemiah 11:19 says the gatekeepers numbered 172 men. There weren't that many gates in the city walls, but Nehemiah made sure they had adequate protection. They had worked so diligently to rebuild the walls and re-establish the city, they weren't going to let down their guard now that the walls were finished. Guard your heart, guard your spirit, guard your mind, guard the call of God upon your life! Place the spiritual disciplines needed in your life to enable you to make wise choices and wise, godly decisions. Establish the gatekeepers necessary in your life to control what comes in and what goes out!

We've identified the gates and if we agree we need gatekeepers, then exactly who are the gatekeepers? I can suggest a number of things. For instance, **The word of God is a gatekeeper.** Are we allowing things into our life that are contrary to God's word, God's commandments, God's plan for our lives? We will talk more about this in a moment but everything you allow into your life should pass the inspection of God's word. If it doesn't align with God's word, if it's contrary to God's word and will, don't let it into your life.

The Holy Spirit is a gatekeeper. We need the presence and power of the Holy Spirit at work in our life. In John 16 Jesus said the Holy Spirit would convict us of sin and convince us of righteousness. He said He would guide us and show us what truth is so we won't be deceived and let destructive things and habits into our lives. If the Holy Spirit convicts you or you feel that check from the Holy Spirit in your heart or mind, don't let it past the gate!

The peace of God is a gatekeeper. Paul said, **“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6-7** Ask yourself, **“Will this thought, this decision rob me of the peace of God that Jesus has given me?”** If it will, don't let it through the gate. Don't let it into your life, your heart, your mind. Jesus said, **“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be**

troubled and do not be afraid.” John 14:27 Let God’s peace be a gatekeeper and don’t let your heart become troubled and afraid.

Let’s go a little further with this. Remember the verse we read at the beginning? **“After the wall had been rebuilt and I had set the doors in place, the gatekeepers and the singers and the Levites were appointed.”** We see the importance of the gatekeepers, but what’s up with the singers and Levites? Nehemiah understood the people of Jerusalem needed more than walls and gates. The walls contained, protected and identified the people, but that wasn’t enough. They needed the life of God in that city and in their own hearts. They needed a revival.

It’s the same with the church. We can build and remodel the facility, we can get new walls and new technology, but if we don’t have a move of God, if we don’t have the anointing of the Holy Spirit upon our services and if we don’t preach the Word of God then it’s all for nothing. That’s what Nehemiah realized, so according to Nehemiah 7:67 he appointed 245 men and women singers. He had a choir and worship leaders and a band that led the way in spiritual worship and prayer and praise to the Lord. Why is this so important?

Psalms 137 tells us, **“By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said ‘Sing us one of the songs of Zion!’ How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?” Psalm 137:1-4**

All these years they had hung up their harps. They hadn’t sung because they had been in exile, captives in Babylon. But they were home now. Nehemiah wanted them to learn how to worship and sing again. They were home because God had kept his word and delivered them and now it was time to sing, now it was time to worship, to lift their voices in praise and thanksgiving. In chapter 12 at the dedication of the wall Nehemiah had two choirs assigned to give thanks. One walked on the wall in one direction with musicians playing while the other choir walked in the opposite direction. They literally surrounded the city walls with worship and the bible says **“The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away.” Nehemiah 12:43**

The walls of your life are rebuilt and gatekeepers are guarding the gates, now it’s time for revival. It’s time for worship. That’s another way to guard the gates because if you are praying, worshiping and giving thanks to God, it’s hard to let sin into your life. Worship became a part of their lives, expressing their praise and thanks to God. But it wasn’t just about the singers.

Nehemiah also appointed the Levites. The Levites were appointed to teach and explain the Law of God to the people.

Chapters 8 and 9 tell about Ezra reading the law to the people. They stood as he read from daybreak until noon. Keep in mind, these folks either had been in exile or were born to parents who had been exiled from the land. They had been without the temple, without sacrifices, there was much they didn't know about keeping the law. The Levites had been trained in the law so as Ezra read to the people, the bible says **“The Levites...instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there. They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read.” Nehemiah 8:7-8**

Nehemiah built the walls, but that wasn't enough. He wanted the people to live according to the law of God. He wanted them to experience more than just the safety of the walls, he wanted them to experience the blessings of God associated with living in obedience to God's word. He wanted them to know how to apply the word of God to their lives every day. Chapter 9 says they gathered another day to hear the Law of God read and in response to the teaching of God's word, **“They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the wickedness of their fathers...They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the Lord their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshiping the Lord their God.” Nehemiah 9:2-3**

That's revival. When you understand the word of God and it brings you to repentance and to worship and thanksgiving. They repented of their sins and began to worship and give thanks to God for his mercy. The Levites said to them, **“Stand up and praise the Lord your God, who is from everlasting to everlasting.” Nehemiah 9:5** It's more than getting the walls and gates in place, it's allowing Jesus and the Holy Spirit to bring life inside those walls.

Are you ready for revival in your life? Assuming we've got the walls and gates in place, **Have you appointed gatekeepers for your life?** Are you monitoring who and what is coming in through the gates of your life? **Are you reading and applying God's word to your life?** Get some Levites in place so you can understand and apply God's word. **Have you invited Jesus and His Holy Spirit to bring life inside the walls of your life?** New walls. New gates. Now it's time for a new way of living. It's time for revival. It's time to get serious about living for Jesus.

