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SERMON TITLE: Looking Reality Straight in the Face

Rebuilding a City: Trusting God & Each other

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 2:9-20

DATE: May 24, 2020

View online service at www.fpcd.org/live-stream

READ also Luke 9:23-27.

If you saw a project, an occupation that you were drawn to—some of you have invested in going overseas to help people groups with language development. You might invest in a water project in Africa. Another person mentors refugee women right here in Dallas on how to build a small business to sell the product they sew. She invests in them. Someone else buys used autos to fix up and sell, with integrity. You might be someone who wants to run your own business so you buy one. Maybe you want to be a teacher to teach others the craft you love. Or you sell things you make—cakes, jellies, soaps, quilts, or jewelry. You want to invest in marketing them.

Still others invest in certain properties—fixer-uppers to renovate and hopefully sell for a nice profit. But no matter where you are in that ladder, whether you are the renovator or the purchaser, **you better do your homework**. You better know exactly what your costs and commitments will be because there will be things you do not see. You better anticipate the time it takes to complete the task or the cost of gaining the education, and the resources to cover the necessary expenses that you did not count on.

There are few gravy trains. Your best bet is to buy low, or be time-rich, or have deep pockets; because of Murphy's Law! I have experience with this! Do you?

When strategizing about your dream, it's best to look reality straight in the face. Count the cost or you'll pay the price.

But maybe it will be good, the #1 most rewarding thing you've ever done! Nehemiah had heard about the troubles of the city that he had a great deal of affection for. It was "the home of his ancestors." He wanted to invest. Duncanville has many citizens who have affection for this place—maybe they grew up around here or know that it is the prettiest part of the Metroplex (and it is!). When Nehemiah heard his city was a pile of rubble and languishing in shame, he remembered back to what it was and—he knew what it could be! He wanted to take on the whole project of rebuilding. So he prayed.

It's hard to know whether he initiated this project or whether God called him to do the job when he prayed. It's a partnership. God's an entrepreneur and an investor.

Nehemiah experienced a unique gift when he prayed. Are you an investor who prays? Nehemiah credits God with planting the vision and strategic plan. So when opportunity knocked he was ready; and he received more than he dreamed possible. When he saw the outcome, he said, "God's interested. God has empowered me to do what I want to do!"

God desires to achieve well-developed culture (that's what these investments are—culture-building) because God cares. Remember our questions?

- Is God involved in the world's troubles?
- Does God help people, cities, and nations overcome adversity?
- Does God take action with the intent to rescue, protect, and rebuild people and cities when calamity hits?

Nehemiah says a resounding yes, because . . .

- ✓ *The king gave him time off,*
- ✓ *sent him to the city with a military escort,*
- ✓ *funded his building supply needs,*
- ✓ *and paid his housing expenses, including building the house.*

What more could he want! He set out on the 900 mile journey fully vested. The trip would take three months. Hear the story: READ Nehemiah 2:9-20

When you take on a project, especially a God-sized one, you better look reality straight in the face. Let's look at

Nehemiah's Best Practices

1. Don't talk too soon.

He arrived fully funded to rebuild the wall and he didn't brag. Why should we refrain from bragging? He had the funds, he had the authority. But . . . *the job was not done yet*. All the supplies in the world would not produce a positive outcome by itself. If he came in there with a big head and a wad of money, it would not be long before the money was gone and the wall still unbuilt. As Jesus says, "Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16).

My husband and I spent a year looking for a home in Duncanville. We put a contract on one. I was excited and told people about it. He was less excited. He said nothing. We hired an inspector who found so much I had not noticed: all the light switches were upside down. A bucket caught water under the sink because the pipe was broken. The dishwasher had standing water in the bottom. The new wood floor covered huge foundation cracks. The fuse box was inaccessible. The list went on and on.

The house was a disaster. We canceled the contract. Don't talk too soon.

2. Assess the damage – what needs to be done?

Taking only a few trusted men, Nehemiah walked the wall at night. Why? Stealth. He, as developer, needed to assess for himself, not just take someone's word for the wall's condition. How many sections were solid? How many broken down? How were they broken down? What hindrances were there? How was the city laid out? Where was the water supply? How big were the gates? The doors? What supplies would he need?

Some of the rubble was so great that he couldn't get through to get near the wall. It would be so hard to repair that section that he decided to move the wall out a bit. (see map at end of sermon)

During our own nation's disaster, what damage are you dealing with, exactly? What needs to be done in your project, ministry, or job? What adjustments can be made? What is the cost to you and others? You need to take a look yourself, not just take someone else's word. The Lord will bring to you some creative solutions should you choose to include God in the discussion.

3. Engage others in the vision.

Nehemiah tells us his vision was inspired by God. Nehemiah loved his city and his people, yes, and he had skills and talents for urban renewal. But it was the emotional impact of having something you love collapse. He took some people around—"let's go out the Valley Gate." As they walk under broken beams and rubble they all feel it together.

Drive around your town. See the impact on the local businesses you pass. Listen to your friends whose businesses which they built have been affected. At FPCD, look at the three silent schools across the street. Nehemiah knew this town would only be revived by the collective caring effort of its citizens as they come together in unity for the common good. That comes from our heart—hearts must be opened and wills conformed to the higher good. Together as we remember, we will see the bigger picture of what it can be. Not me, not he, but "let us" overcome, with the Lord who always inspires renewal and revival.

4. Don't be intimidated by the naysayers

Reality is, you are always going to have detractors, critics, cynics, and just plain evil people. They are a test and a temptation. How are you going to act? Will you keep your integrity?

Once, King Saul pursued future king David to kill him because he was threatened by David's success. The tables got turned, Saul was in a vulnerable position and David could have easily killed him. His army urged *now's your opportunity!* David snuck up and cut a corner off Saul's robe. Then his conscience disturbed him. *I shouldn't have done that. Lord forbid I should attack the Lord's anointed one.* So he restrained his men. (see 1 Samuel 24-26)

Nehemiah could handle Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem because he recalled God's words:

"Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you and hold you. . . . You will look in vain for those who tried to conquer you. Those who attack you will come to nothing. . . . I am here to help you." (Isaiah 41:10-12)

5. Cling to the vision

Every town is God's town. God gave the mandate—go out, fill the earth with the products and processes of culture. This is reflected here. We share in God's work – We are God's entrepreneurs. We must cling to the vision given us.

There will be times when we invest and fears overwhelm us.

But God tells us not to be afraid 150 times in the Bible.

There will be times when we are tempted to give in to ambition.

But it's not about me, "WE" overcome calamity together.

There will be times when we want to retaliate against our enemy.

But we must resist because vengeance belongs to the Lord.

There will be times you feel the victim and can't see the outcome.

But when you walk with God's vision you have the power and victory of God!

Jesus said,

"If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but are yourself lost or destroyed? (Luke 9:24-25).

God loves every city and desires for us to flourish. We must look reality straight in the face in order to rebuild, revive, thrive. What are you rebuilding? Your small business? A ministry? This community? Students in school? Your church? We will overcome. With God who is powerful it can be done. Let's overcome!

AMEN

