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SERMON TITLE: All Together Now

Rebuilding a City: Trusting God & Each other

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 3

DATE: May 31, 2020

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

READ also 1 Corinthians 3:5-8.

There is a bond among Christians. It results from the gift that Jesus gives you and me when we believe: the Holy Spirit. Today marks the giving of the Holy Spirit.

Having the Holy Spirit means we are ONE in the Spirit. We may not always understand the Spirit but we know when we are “one in the Spirit.” We have experienced it here working on an excellent online Worship Presentation for those of you at home. We are “of the same mind” in our goal to succeed in serving you!

On the day of Pentecost believers met together, studied together, shared meals, prayed, and shared the Good News with others. They were “of one mind” to do this. They were engaged and passionate.

Last week we talked about Nehemiah inspecting the wall and telling the people about his vision to rebuild it and what God had done to provide the supplies. All the people responded “YES! Let’s do this!” They were “of one mind.” So Nehemiah organized the people. The workers who committed to the project came from towns and villages far beyond the city.

That result happened because Nehemiah’s plan inspired the people to have heart for their city.

As I read it, please take pen and paper and listen for the answer to these questions:

1. What people were involved and where did they work?
2. What occupations or positions do they hold?
3. What are the segments or pieces of the community represented?
4. Where were the people from?

The record begins at the northeast corner of the city wall and goes counterclockwise gate by gate. READ Nehemiah 3. (Reading and map below)

This was a community affair. Note the people who worked together to repair the wall, the gates, the infrastructure, the open spaces, city buildings, cemetery, museum, and people’s houses:

- Men, sons, daughters, grandchildren, and other kin

They worked in sections where they had interest—near their homes or places of business or church. They worked with their family members or those in their own community.

Note their positions and occupations:

- Priests/pastors, church musicians and unordained staff (Levites), temple servants;
- Civic leaders, mayors, city council members, tax collectors, the police force;
- Merchants, artisans, construction workers, everyday citizens;
- Students (sons, daughters, grandchildren, other kin). Jewish people educated their young.

Why do the names and their particular contributions matter?

- It takes contribution from each segment of a culture to create a balanced whole. Can you imagine a city without art? What about a city without administration and regulation? How would we function without business owners? How would we have faith and moral guidance without the church? How would our young grow and take their place in the community without an education? A community needs people with a variety of talents because the sum of all those talents is more than each individual part.

Did you notice the verse that said *the nobles from Tekoa refused to get their hands dirty because they did not want to work with the construction supervisors*? Pride can be a hindrance.

Note the people were from:

- Eight surrounding towns. Villagers from one town repaired not only one of the gates, but an additional 1,500 feet of the wall—the length of five football fields!
- All worked with such great enthusiasm that some locals repaired their own homes (how long had they tolerated broken down houses with no motivation to do anything about it?).
- This city drew people because it contained a market for the products of the farmers in the countryside. Notice the leaders from those areas, who likely came because it would help their communities for this city to be rebuilt. Sheep and livestock was brought in at the Sheep Gate; fish were brought in the Fish Gate.

What is your heart for the health of your city? How unified are we in 2020? How do we value what each other brings to the table?

When someone brings their skills, perspective, and insight, we all gain something we do not otherwise have and the sum of the whole becomes greater than each part. We all can do more to not only “help our neighbor” but also “inspire our neighbor” to make a contribution, too.

Nehemiah was highly successful in understanding this. He drew people with different religious and political outlooks, occupations, and vastly different experiences. Some had never been exiled; others had. Yet they had a spirit of willingness and unselfish cooperation to set aside personal pride and ambition for the larger task.

It made the difference between success and failure.

Jesus' purpose has always been for diverse people to come together "that they might be one." There's a reason for this. When individuals work together for the common good as people "of one mind," something heroic happens: *the sum of the whole is greater than its parts*. It is the power of unity and cooperation.

Remember, they were overcoming a devastating defeat and their city had lain in ruins for years. This was no ordinary time. But God was at work with them reviving their city and their livelihoods and their spirits in the process.

In hard times like we are experiencing with COVID – 19 and trying to restart our own cities, it's easy to see how we sometimes do not know how to move forward. Life is not normal. But God always brings hope. God does it through people who pray and seek God's help.

There's a man named Charlie Plumb who learned that in a prisoner of war camp in Vietnam. Upon graduating from the Air Force Academy in 1964, he was sent to Vietnam. After 75 missions, he was five days from going home. Flying toward Hanoi, he was protecting bomb carriers from MiG attacks when his plane was hit. He ejected, was captured, stripped, beaten, and imprisoned in solitary confinement for three months.

In solitary confinement no external event happens to you. All you can do is talk to yourself. That kind of circumstance could ruin your life forever.

But Charlie hung onto his faith and his training. He began examining what he really believed.

One day he heard a chirp. He looked for the cricket. It was coming from the corner. But instead he discovered a wire, scratching through a hole. And he became afraid. It meant there were others. An overriding fear welled up in him. Suppose he was not adequate next to this person. The man was probably tougher; smarter. To tug on the wire meant he had to expose his tender underside. But he also desperately needed someone to reassure him. He needed to not be alone. He took the risk and tugged. The wire disappeared. An hour later it came back with a written code. He was to memorize it and swallow the paper.

So they communicated by code on toilet paper. The first note read, "How you doing buddy?" Charlie replied, "Terrible." He listed everyone he blamed, from the President to his mother.

The second note: "You want to know your problem? It's prison thinking. It can kill you. When you feel sorry for yourself,

when you blame others, you give them control over your life. But with faith and commitment to your hometown and roots, you can serve in all circumstances." Well, this would be a new attitude.

Over time, more POWs were put together until finally 57 guys were in one cell. The men decided they wanted a Bible and the ability to have a church service. Can you imagine the diversity and yet that was the primary thing they wanted and stood together as a group.

The enemy said no. The POWs went on a hunger strike to demonstrate their unity. The enemy next cut off food. Then water. They began pulling the senior men to torture. #1, #2, then #3. Number 3 was a Jew. What would he care about having the Bible and a church service? But he stood with his buddies, even under torture. The Vietcong inflicted this abuse on five men but all stood strong. They did not resist. They did not spit in anyone's face. They simply stood strong for each other and what they believed in, regardless of abuse and torture. The Vietcong gave in. They gave those Americans a Bible and the church service.

Unity and faith had won the victory!

One day the POWs received the news they would go home. Twenty of them were told to get on the bus to the airport. The senior man said, "No. We'll only go after all the sick and injured are sent home." The enemy took him out to torture him.

Can you guess what the POWs did? Exactly the same thing. They held strong together and guess who went home first? *All the sick and injured*. And then they boarded a plane themselves.

When you are "All Together Now," regardless of political, religious, racial or other difference, when you set your mind that God will help you, then "one in the Spirit" comes alive.

While we know each person's name, it's not that the names are as important as that their collective effort accomplished something heroic which could not be done by any one person alone.

God desires men and women, young and old, rich and poor to work together as one. When we are one in the Spirit together, and do not succumb to "failure thinking" we can accomplish heroic efforts still now, in our own time of need.

Nehemiah and his people committed to rebuilding their city. On the day of Pentecost believers became "one in the Spirit," bringing together many nationalities around the Good News.

What will be said of us, in 2020? How will our story be written? It depends. What kind of thinking do you embrace? *All together now . . .*

AMEN

NEHEMIAH 3 ^{NLT}

Then Eliashib the high priest and the other priests started to rebuild at the Sheep Gate. They dedicated it and set up its doors, building the wall as far as the Tower of the Hundred, which they dedicated, and the Tower of Hananel. ² People from the town of Jericho worked next to them, and beyond them was Zaccur son of Imri.

³ The Fish Gate was built by the sons of Hassenaah. They laid the beams, set up its doors, and installed its bolts and bars. ⁴ Meremoth son of Uriah and grandson of Hakkoz repaired the next section of wall. Beside him were Meshullam son of Berekiah and grandson of Meshezabel, and then Zadok son of Baana. ⁵ Next were the people from Tekoa, though their leaders refused to work with the construction supervisors.

⁶ The Old City Gate was repaired by Joiada son of Paseah and Meshullam son of Besodeiah. They laid the beams, set up its doors, and installed its bolts and bars. ⁷ Next to them were Melatiah from Gibeon, Jadon from Meronoth, people from Gibeon, and people from Mizpah, the headquarters of the governor of the province west of the Euphrates River. ⁸ Next was Uzziel son of Harhaiah, a goldsmith by trade, who also worked on the wall. Beyond him was Hananiah, a manufacturer of perfumes. They left out a section of Jerusalem as they built the Broad Wall. ⁹ Rephaiah son of Hur, the leader of half the district of Jerusalem, was next to them on the wall. ¹⁰ Next Jedaiah son of Harumaph repaired the wall across from his own house, and next to him was Hattush son of Hashabneiah.

¹¹ Then came Malkijah son of Harim and Hasshub son of Pahath-moab, who repaired another section of the wall and the Tower of the Ovens. ¹² Shallum son of Hallohesh and his daughters repaired the next section. He was the leader of the other half of the district of Jerusalem.

¹³ The Valley Gate was repaired by the people from Zanoah, led by Hanun. They set up its doors and installed its bolts and bars. They also repaired the 1,500 feet of wall to the Dung Gate.

¹⁴ The Dung Gate was repaired by Malkijah son of Recab, the leader of the Beth-hakkerem district. He rebuilt it, set up its doors, and installed its bolts and bars.

¹⁵ The Fountain Gate was repaired by Shallum son of Col-hozeh, the leader of the Mizpah district. He rebuilt it, roofed it, set up its doors, and installed its bolts and bars. Then he repaired the wall of the pool of Siloam near the king's garden, and he rebuilt the wall as far as the stairs that descend from the City of David. ¹⁶ Next to him was Nehemiah son of Azbuk, the leader of half the district of Beth-zur. He rebuilt the wall from a place across from the tombs of David's family as far as the water reservoir and the House of the Warriors. ¹⁷ Next to him, repairs were made by a group of Levites working under the supervision of Rehum son of Bani. Then came Hashabiah, the leader of half the district of Keilah, who supervised the building of the wall on behalf of his own district. ¹⁸ Next down the line were his countrymen led by Binnui son of Henadad, the leader of the other half of the district of Keilah. ¹⁹ Next to them, Ezer son of Jeshua, the leader of Mizpah, repaired another section of wall across from the ascent to the armory near the angle in the wall. ²⁰ Next to him was Baruch son of Zabbai, who zealously repaired an additional section from the angle to the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest. ²¹ Meremoth son of Uriah and grandson of Hakkoz rebuilt another section of the wall extending from the door of Eliashib's house to the end of the house. ²² The next repairs were made by the priests from the surrounding region. ²³ After them, Benjamin and Hasshub repaired the section across from their house, and Azariah son of Maaseiah and grandson of Ananiah repaired the section across from his house. ²⁴ Next was Binnui son of Henadad, who rebuilt another section of the wall from Azariah's house to the angle and the corner. ²⁵ Palal son of Uzai carried on the work from a point opposite the angle and the tower that projects up from the king's upper house beside the court of the guard. Next to him were Pedaiah son of Parosh, ²⁶ with the Temple servants living on the hill of Ophel, who repaired the wall as far as a point across from the Water Gate to the east and the projecting tower. ²⁷ Then came the people of Tekoa, who repaired another section across from the great projecting tower and over to the wall of Ophel.

²⁸ Above the Horse Gate, the priests repaired the wall. Each one repaired the section immediately across from his own house. ²⁹ Next Zadok son of Immer also rebuilt the wall across from his own house, and beyond him was Shemaiah son of Shecaniah, the gatekeeper of the East Gate. ³⁰ Next Hananiah son of Shelemiah and Hanun, the sixth son of Zalaph, repaired another section, while Meshullam son of Berekiah rebuilt the wall across from where he lived.

³¹ Malkijah, one of the goldsmiths, repaired the wall as far as the housing for the Temple servants and merchants, across from the Inspection Gate. Then he continued as far as the upper room at the corner.

³² The other goldsmiths and merchants repaired the wall from that corner to the Sheep Gate.

GATES THE PEOPLE REPAIRED TOWNS THAT PARTICIPATED

Jerusalem Restored
by Nehemiah

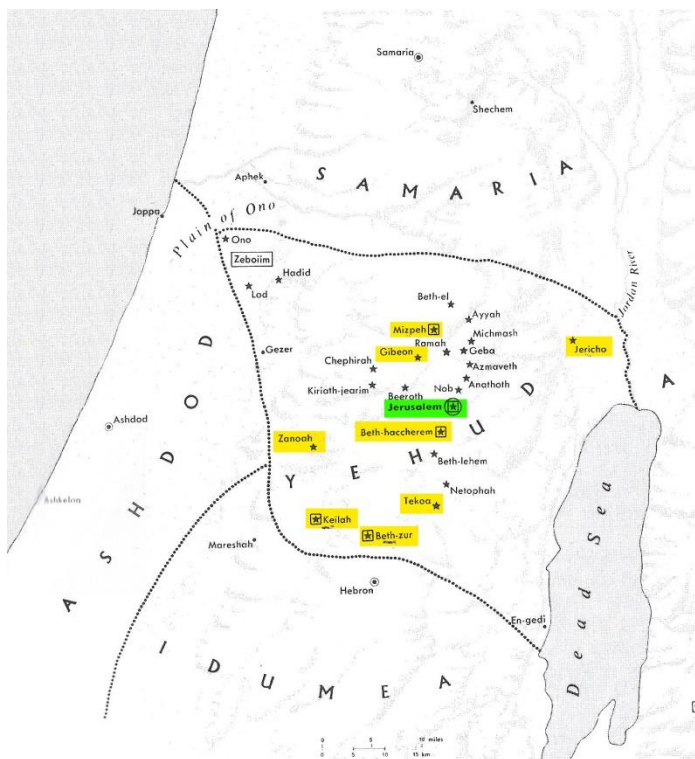
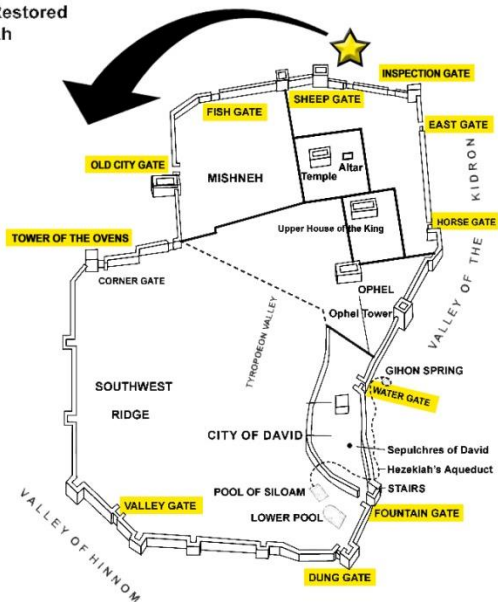


Fig. 1 The Post-exilic Province of Judah (After Aharoni and Avi-Yonah)