

COMMITMENT & COOPERATION IN BUILDING FOR GOD

A PICTURE OF THE CHURCH

If I was to ask you what comes to mind when you think of the ideal church – what kinds of things would enter your thinking?

Some may think of a certain type of building – nice worship space, stained glass, spacious classrooms, big fellowship room, maybe a gym?

Others may think of a service that includes a particular kind of music or other worship elements or liturgy.

Others may think of excellent programs for all ages.

We've begun a new series on Nehemiah. Today we are going to look at Nehemiah 3 which outlines a great picture of the church and the kind of church God wants. The picture of the ideal church we find in Nehemiah is – the people of God committed and cooperating together to accomplish God's purposes for His glory.

At first glance, Nehemiah 3 looks kind of dull and boring – it's mainly just a list of names that are hard to pronounce. It's the kind of chapter in the Bible that you just skim over or skip. But when you take a closer look, it has some great insights and principles about being the kind of church God wants.

In Nehemiah 3 the people of Jerusalem under the direction of Nehemiah have begun reconstructing the walls around the city. This was important for them for both military and spiritual reasons. Walls would fortify them against attack, and would also build up their faith, and remove the disgrace associated with the ruined walls.

Chapter 3 describes 40 key people who led in rebuilding 45 sections of the wall. The drawing on the screen shows the various sections of the wall that were rebuilt.

We don't know exactly how big the walls of the city were at that time. The walls rebuilt in Nehemiah are not the same walls we have around the city of Jerusalem today. The walls back then were probably in the 3-4 km range and 7-10 meters high or 20-30 feet. The amazing thing we read in chapter 6:15 is that the people of Jerusalem rebuilt these walls in just 52 days. In order to accomplish that amazing feat they had to be committed and cooperate together. And this is exactly what we see in chapter 3. I won't read the chapter – that would put you all to sleep, but let me highlight some verses that illustrate both the commitment and the cooperation and the picture this gives us of the church.

1/ COMMITMENT TO THE WORK OF GOD

I want you to notice 3 things about what commitment involves.

1st - Commitment involves dedicating ourselves to God.

V1 – Notice that the High Priests set the example, along with the other priests. *Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate. They dedicated it and set its doors in place, building as far as the Tower of the Hundred, which they dedicated, and as far as the Tower of Hananel.*

These were the religious leaders of the day, but they were not averse to getting their hands dirty. They could have made excuses about being too busy in the Temple, but they didn't. They actively put their hands and their hearts to the work of rebuilding.

These priests had the privilege, we read of working on the "Sheep Gate". This is the gate nearest the Temple. It is the gate through which the animals for sacrifices were brought. It is significant that the work began here. The rebuilding of the walls had spiritual significance for the people. By starting with the Sheep Gate, Nehemiah is saying – *"let's put God first"*. He was establishing and emphasizing to the people of Jerusalem that their relationship with God was central. Once the Sheep Gate was rebuilt they had a time of dedication right there. They dedicated the gate and themselves to the task.

In any work we do in the church we have to begin with putting God first. We must be dedicated and committed not only to the task at hand, but first to God.

[As we as a church prayerfully consider a major building program. Before we launch into something like that we must first dedicate ourselves and the project to the Lord. God isn't primarily concerned about our buildings, or our programs, or our money. He is primarily concerned about our heart and whether our hearts are aligned with His to accomplish His will and purpose.]

As Peter instructs us in 1 Peter 3:15 – *"in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord ..."*

2nd - Commitment involves sacrifice in the work of God.

You will notice in Nehemiah 3 that not everyone who did the building even lived in Jerusalem. There are at least ½ dozen references to people who lived up to 25-30 or more kms away. They traveled the distance and presumably stayed for 52 days to complete the work. That was a great commitment and sacrifice. They had their own fields to cultivate, or businesses to attend to. They had their own families to care for, but they left them behind and generously committed their time and service for a greater cause.

Through the centuries, the church has been built on those who have sacrificed and were even willing to work behind the scenes without recognition. They were willing to do anything to further God's agenda – whether – cleaning, setting up chairs, catering, repairs, visiting, literature distribution – whatever was needed. They set aside their own agendas, and gave of themselves and their resources for the glory of God.

We still need sacrifice and generosity today. In fact the work of the church will be paralyzed and unable to accomplish its purpose without it.

Have you ever done the *"Hokey Pokey"*? You know – that little song and dance that tells us to put our left arm or right leg or some other body part into the circle, *"shake it all about. You do the hokey pokey and you turn yourself around. That what it's all about."* The song ends with *"put your whole self in ..."*

When I think of that song and dance, I'm reminded of what the apostle Paul said in Romans 12 :1. Here is his instruction from the Living Bible – *“And so, dear brothers, I plead with you to give your bodies to God. Let them be a living sacrifice, holy—the kind he can accept. When you think of what he has done for you, is this too much to ask?”*

3rd - Commitment involves perseverance in the work of God.

V20 – Baruch – *“zealously repaired another section”*. The root of the word zealous used here is *“to burn”*. Baruch was really on fire for the Lord and the Lord's work. Notice also that *“he repaired another section”*. This phrase pops up a few times in chapter 3. Once the job was completed the workers did not say – *“well that's my part done. Too bad you other guys are so slow.”* No. They immediately went to work on another section until the whole job was finished. For instance:

V27 – the people of Tekoa *“repaired another section”*. This is particularly noteworthy because their extra work was in stark contrast to the big shots of the city. We read about the nobles in v5. The *“nobles would not put their shoulders to the work”*. They were too good for that. You will always have some who will do nothing, even in the church, but that should not stop the work of God for the glory of God.

Paul commands us in Colossians 3:23,24 – *“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”*

We certainly see a picture of this in Nehemiah 3. These people realized they were not just building a wall, they were building for the glory of God, and that made all the difference. That's the same kind of commitment, hard work, and perseverance that is necessary in the church of God as well.

Over the last 50+ years of Bramalea Baptist Church we have seen a great deal of commitment by the people of the church to do God's work for His glory. We praise the Lord for the many here now and the many who have gone before who modeled great commitment, sacrifice and perseverance. We would not have the spiritual legacy we do if that were not the case. We would not have been able to see many come to faith in Christ, be baptized and grow as His disciples. We would not have seen many go both across the street and around the world as witnesses for Him. We would not have the programs we do, or the building we have or the people we have without the gracious commitment of so many both today and in the past. Praise God for this. Amen?

2. COOPERATION WITH ONE ANOTHER

In Nehemiah 3 we also see a tremendous description of cooperation with one another to get the job done. It was a wonderfully organized effort. Starting at the sheep gate and working around counterclockwise all the sections were covered. A couple of truths are pictured here.

1st - We need one another in the work of God.

You will notice as you read through Nehemiah 3 phrases like – *“next to him”, “next to them”, “after him”, “after them”*. They show up 28 times in the chapter. The principle is – everyone was to be involved at the same time – just like in the church – everyone has a part to play and when we do it together we can accomplish much.

Dr. Halbeck, a missionary of the Church of England, once stood at the top of hill overlooking a leper colony and saw 2 lepers at work sowing peas in a field. One had no hands and one had no feet. The one who had no hands was carrying the other who had no feet on his back who carried in his hands a bag of seed, and dropped a pea every now and then, which the other pressed into the ground with his foot; and so they managed the work of one person between the two by cooperating with one another.

You will also notice as you read through the lists of the people involved in the rebuilding that not a single professional builder is mentioned. There were goldsmiths mentioned 3 times (8,31,32), merchants (32), priests, rulers, farmers, and even perfume makers (8) – but no professional builders. For that matter the guy organizing the whole project was just a former cupbearer from the Persian palace. And yet the people took whatever ability and talent they had and cooperated together to accomplish the task to the glory of God.

God is much more interested in our AVAILABILITY, than our CAPABILITY!

There is a significant entry along with Shallum, ruler of a half district of Jerusalem in v22. The text says he repaired a section of the wall *“along with his daughters”*. This is a rare reference. It was not the norm in that day for females to do this kind of work, but they too cooperated to get the job done.

I mentioned before that the priests go the privilege of starting the work at the Sheep Gate. No doubt everyone would have liked to work there. It would be exciting. It would be a gate many would see, being next to the Temple. You could stand back afterwards and say – *“I helped build the Sheep Gate.”* But who would want to work on the Dung Gate? Well, someone did. His name was Mal-ki-jah (14). He was actually a ruler of the district about 3 kms south of Jerusalem. He willingly cooperated for the common good by building the Dung Gate.

All of us, no matter who we are and where we serve in the church are important. We need one another to accomplish God’s purposes for His glory.

This is the same thing the apostle Paul said in Ephesians 4. He outlines the purpose of the ideal church in vv12,13 – *“that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach the unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature (or built up) attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”* That’s what the church is all about!

2nd - Each one has a significant contribution to make in the work of God.

Another key phrase in chapter 3 is the word *“section”*. It is used 13 times. The wall was divided and people were assigned a certain section to work on. Just like in the church no one person can do it all, but everyone can do something. Romans 12:6 tells us *“we have different gifts according to the grace given to us ...”*.

Each one of us is different and unique. We all have different gifts, talents, abilities, backgrounds. Everyone has a part to play and a contribution to make. And each and every person is valuable and their contribution is vital.

Sometimes with our grandkids, Margo and I play the game – Jenga. Ever played that game? You start with a bunch of rectangular wooden blocks. Then you stack them in a

way that makes a little tower. Then one by one, in turn, you remove a block from the tower. After a while the tower begins to wobble a bit. The loser is the one who makes it fall.

The apostle Peter tells us in 1 Peter 2:5 – *“you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”*

The structure that you and I are a part of – that spiritual building – can’t stand with blocks missing. To be its best and strongest and not collapse – every block needs to be in place, and every person must do their part in cooperation with one another.

My son’s girlfriend, Jackie, is joining her sister and 13 other women starting out next Saturday, with a goal to run a marathon relay to cover the entire 894 kms of the Bruce Trail in 1 week running 24 hours a day. They hope to set a Guinness Book world record by being the first women’s team to do this. Each runner will run according to their ability and training – some 5 k, and up to 20 k at a time or more - then hand off to another. Their motto is – *“Have ordinary people complete an extraordinary feat.”* It would be extremely difficult for one person to run the whole Bruce Trail, but together – although still very challenging they hope to get the job done.

So too in the church. Each one of us has a role to play and a contribution to make. We may think of ourselves as ordinary, just as the people of Jerusalem did. But together, like them, we can do extraordinary things.

Peter said in 1 Peter 4 that whatever your spiritual gift is—*“each of you should use (the) ... gift you have received to serve others ... so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be glory and power for ever and ever. Amen.”* (vv 10,11)

Just imagine what the body of Christ here at BBC might be able to accomplish for the glory of God when the people of God are fully committed and cooperating together.

At a Canadian Horse Show I read about, one event is a *“strength pull”* to test which horse can pull the most weight. At one particular show, the horse winning the event was able to pull 9,000 pounds. The second horse was able to pull 8,000 pounds. The show's organizers thought that if they yoked the 2 animals together, they should be able to pull about 17,000 pounds. In fact, when yoked together, the pair of horses was able to pull 30,000 pounds! Two together in a team can do more than either one can do on their own.

Just imagine what a team of 1500 people can do in the work of God. It will be *“immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”* (Eph 2:20-21)