

Teamwork Nehemiah 3:1-32

There are some sports that we can happily do on our own. Whereas there are other sports that must be played as part of a team.

Let me give you a few examples.

Think about **cycling**. You don't need anyone else to do this. You do need a bike otherwise it's just called walking. But once you have a bike that's all you need. Off you go.

The same is true of **marathon running**.

And even **chess**. You need an opponent but you don't need a team to play with you.

Whereas this is exactly what you need if you are going to play **football** or **netball** or if you are going to compete in a **relay race** where you pass the baton to someone else. You really can't do this on your own.

What about being a Christian? How does God want us to live out our faith? Is this something we can do on our own? Or does God want us to do this together? **Indeed, has he designed the Christian life to be a team sport rather than an individual pursuit?**

The Bible makes it clear. It is not good for us to be alone.

God is not saving people for individual faith. No, he is forming us into a community that loves Jesus, loves each other and loves those around us who don't yet follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

One of the reasons that stops us getting actively involved in the ministry of the church is because we don't really see a place for us.

This may be because we don't see a role. Or maybe we feel inadequate about what we could offer. Or perhaps we feel embarrassed by our past and can't really believe God might want to use us as part of his grand and glorious building project.

I want to encourage this this morning from **Nehemiah chapter 3** that when we become Christians there **is** a space for us on God's team and God wants us to be an active player in his squad.

This doesn't mean we all do the same thing.

It doesn't mean we always do the same thing throughout our lives. Roles change depending on the season we are living through, whether age or illness or a global pandemic.

But what is clear from the Bible is that God has a significant place for **you** on his spiritual team.

I know that at first sight **Nehemiah chapter 3** doesn't seem the most exciting part of the Bible. It's a chapter full of names and places. And maybe your only thought this morning as it was read was to thank God that it wasn't your turn on the reading rota this week!

However, it is part of God's Word. We can be assured that all of the Bible is exactly as God intended it to be. It wasn't that a trainee heavenly editor was on duty when this chapter was sent in for scrutiny. No, the Holy Spirit inspired every page, every chapter and every verse.

So with the confidence that all Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, let me point out **two** encouraging truths from **Nehemiah chapter 3**.

First of all, notice the whole range of people involved.

Look at verse 1. **Read verse 1a**. The religious officials got their hands dirty! In fact, they led by example. They didn't come with the attitude of "I don't do construction. My speciality is sacrifices at the temple so call me back when I can do some of this." Eliashib saw the need and with **great humility** he got involved in God's building project.

And he wasn't the only one.

Look at verse 2. **Read verse 2**.

And then we get a long list of other people.

Verse 3. **Read verse 3a**.

Or verse 7. **Read verse 7a**.

I love verse 8. **Read verse 8**. Goldsmiths and perfume makers may not be your first choice for a building project and probably this wasn't their first choice for the kind of work they preferred to do. But isn't it wonderful to see that they saw the need and they got stuck in.

Or **verse 12** when we get told of Shallum the ruler of a half-district of Jerusalem who repaired a section of the wall along with his daughters.

The list continues until we get back to the Sheep Gate at the end of the chapter. Basically the chapter takes us all around the wall.

What are we being told? God wants us to notice the whole range of people involved, regardless of their class or location or profession – all working as a team on the one united task.

Amazing! It's all wonderfully positive and inspiring. **Or at least it almost is**. Because even though most people did get involved, we're also told about those who didn't. Look at verse 5. **Read verse 5**.

This is the only mention in the whole chapter of those who didn't get involved so we mustn't let this distract from the beautiful picture of unity in diversity that is painted before our eyes. But the Bible is also realistic and it doesn't air brush difficulties out of its pages. So let's beware the **pride** that keeps us at a distance from kingdom work.

It's worth saying **that pride can come in different forms**.

- The usual form is that we feel so good about ourselves that the task seems beneath us.
- However, another form of pride is to feel so low about ourselves and feel ill equipped for any service even though God has said something to the contrary. This is just another form of pride when we think we know better than God.

So friends be encouraged. God wants all of us on his spiritual team. **Each of us has a place and a part to play**.

This brings me to the second big truth I want to show us from Nehemiah chapter 3.

Second, not everyone does the same thing

We're told that some people repaired some of the gates. Whereas others repaired sections of the wall.

Some people worked on glamorous gates like the Sheep Gate near the temple. But not everyone did. Did you see the name of the gate in verse 14? The Dung Gate. I guess it's what some of our kids would call **the Poo Gate**.

What I also find fascinating is that the people working on the walls didn't all do the same amount.

We're told at the end of **verse 13** that Hanun and the residents of Zanoah, as well as repairing the Valley Gate, also repaired a thousand cubits of the wall. That's 450 metres!

But compare this with what we discover in verse 23 about two people called Benjamin and Hasshub. **Read verse 23**. They made repairs to an area just outside their house.

This isn't a problem. In fact, quite the reverse. It's a way of showing us that everyone has a place in God's building project not everyone has to do the same job.

Or let me put it a different way, **whose names are in chapter 3?** Not those who did the most or those who did the most glamorous tasks. But everyone who was involved. It didn't matter if you went down in history as fixing the Poo Gate or for building the most beautiful part of the wall. What mattered was that you got involved. And what God did was use all the different contributions to ensure his project was completed. **It's about teamwork!**

What does all this mean for us?

We need to be crystal clear what it means to be involved in God's building project today.

Back in Nehemiah's day it meant physically picking up the stones and wood and constructing the city of Jerusalem.

But what does it mean for us? **How can we build Jerusalem today?**

Many of us will be familiar with the hymn Jerusalem that was based on a poem by William Blake.

*And did those feet in ancient time
Walk upon England's mountains green?
And was the holy Lamb of God
On England's pleasant pastures seen?*

The answer is no obviously! Let's read on...

*And did the Countenance Divine
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here
Among these dark Satanic mills?*

Again the answer is no!

Listen to how Blake continues...

*Bring me my bow of burning gold:
Bring me my arrows of desire:
Bring me my spear: O clouds unfold!
Bring me my chariot of fire.*

*I will not cease from mental fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land.*

I used to think this was sentimental rubbish. However, I've changed my mind. This is actually something the Christian should want to do and to see. Because what is Jerusalem in the New Testament. It is code for the people of God.

Jerusalem is no longer a city made of bricks but a hugely diverse people gathered from around the world under the leadership of Jesus Christ.

What does our leader want us to do? To build Jerusalem. Jesus says I will build my church and I will empower you to help me.

We build Jerusalem in **two** directions.

- We go out and we go up
- We go wider and we go higher
- We reach out and we build up
- It's about mission and maturity

How do we do this? Let me give you a few examples.

- We share the Word of God - primary
- We pray
- We encourage
- We comfort
- We serve together – up front, behind the scene and on the sides.

Be encouraged, as we do all this, God will build Jerusalem!

In light of all this, let me finish by suggesting what **our modern day Nehemiah chapter 3** might be like...

Mark and the team turned up early to plug in the cables and set up the cameras. Wendy started a watch party with her friends on Facebook. Maxwell and Naomi got the youth together on Zoom to talk about the sermon. Lucy met a couple of friends to talk about John's Gospel in a local café. Dave and Ailsa after a long day at work started an Explorers Zoom call to make sure the older children

heard the Bible and stayed connected. Lizzy made sure the chairs were sanitised between services and the loos were wiped down. A group of women met to read a book, catch up and pray for each other. Sam and Joyce invited told their friends at church that Treehouse was awesome and invited them along one Sunday. Nancy prayed for her friends and neighbours every Tuesday so they would have a desire to learn about Jesus. Derek posted lots of information on the church Facebook page and it led to Abi hearing about Jesus. Scott and Mary fostered Julie and showed her that unconditional love could be experienced and prompted her to look for more of it in Jesus. Tony made sure all the money was banked and all the bills were paid. **And so it goes on.**

God will build his church. And he wants to use us as his builders.

So be encouraged...

- We all have a place on God's team
- We all have a part to play

So let's get involved, let's stayed involved and let's trust that God will use all our different contributions to grow his church in number and in maturity.

Let's pray.