

Pastor Wayne Puls, Senior Pastor at Hope Lutheran Church

Today we dive right back into the Bible story of Nehemiah.

Just to set the scene for today's story, we began in chapter 1. Nehemiah, an Israelite in exile, hears the news of suffering and adversity in his homeland. The city of Jerusalem is in ruins, unprotected by a city wall, and the people are miserable. So what does Nehemiah do first? He prays. He cries out to his God first, before doing anything; and that's a pretty important principle for us to follow.

Next, in chapter 2, we see Nehemiah shaking in his boots, but nonetheless courageously talking to his boss, the king of Persia. He asks permission to travel to Jerusalem, the holy city of the Jews, to rebuild the city wall. The king has already decreed that the wall not be rebuilt; but now God taps him on the shoulder, and the king grants Nehemiah's request.

So then, Nehemiah travels to Jerusalem, inspects the ruins, plans out the scope of work, and talks to the leaders of the people of Jerusalem. He says, "Look, we're in trouble here. Come on, let's rebuild these walls." He tells them that he has the king's permission, and that God is 100% on board with the project. So they say, "We're in!" And the work commences.

Today we heard the first part of chapter 3. Now, let me just say, Nehemiah chapter 3 is not one of the more exciting, sensational chapters of the Bible. But I love chapter 3. As you'll see, it conveys some valuable lessons for us as a church, and for you and me as Christians.

Chapter 3 is just a long list of names. Some really hard-to-pronounce names! Eliashib, Hananel, Hassenaah, Meremoth, Meshullam, Meshezabel, Zadok, the Tekoites, and many more. Nehemiah records for us the names of all

the different Jerusalemites who helped to repair the wall. We heard part of that long list read earlier.

This extensive list in chapter 3, while not exciting, shows us that Nehemiah was a good recruiter, an excellent planner and strategist. “Eliashib, you take this section with your crew,” Nehemiah must have said, “And Meshullam, you tackle this part of the wall over here.” The work was well-planned and organized, and a lot of people participated.

It was hard work, to be sure. They had to lift and heave the giant stones that had been smashed to the ground, and put them back into place on the protective wall. They had to measure and saw the wood for the city gates, and set them carefully in place. The work was exhausting; but, little by little, with their sanctified sweat and toil, with a cooperative spirit, with plenty of Gatorade, with multiple trips to the local Home Depot or Lowes, with God’s help, the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt.

Have you ever worked hard like that, as part of a team? Strenuous work is tiresome; but, boy, it’s a good feeling when you’re done. I bet those Jerusalemites went home tired, but happy, night after night. Just like when we work together for a big church event, like Touched By Hope, or Night to Shine, or Hope Chest, or Disaster Response, or the Cantata, or a retreat. It’s a great feeling to work hard, to work cooperatively, to accomplish an important task together.

It’s even better when it’s God’s work we are doing. Nehemiah makes it clear, as he tells the story, that it’s not his project. It’s not just the Jerusalemites trying to gain some security. This rebuilding of the walls is God’s work!

See, Nehemiah knows that God has punished the Israelites for their sinful ways. God allowed them to be taken into exile, and allowed their capital city to be destroyed. But Nehemiah also knows that God promised that a remnant would survive,

that a portion of the nation would return to the Holy Land. Nehemiah knows that God hasn't abandoned his people, and that God still intends to keep his covenant promises with the nation.

One of those promises – the very best of all the promises – was that a Savior would come, a Savior from the nation of Israel, a Savior to bless the whole world. So Nehemiah knows that the work they're doing to restore Jerusalem is really God's work. Protecting the people from further harm is the Lord's God's work. Lifting those stones, and rebuilding those gates, isn't just worldly labor. It's God's work. It's part of God's salvation plan for his covenant people. So Nehemiah is thrilled, excited, deeply committed to being a part of God's work back in his day.

What about you and me? What about today? We have opportunities every day, every week, every month, to do God's work.

And, I know, we all have family commitments, job obligations, social responsibilities, health concerns, age restrictions, financial worries, self-confidence issues, maybe a little bit of laziness, and a whole lot of other real-life stuff that dictates our time. But, all the while, our God -- our loving God, who desperately wants to save every sinner -- is tapping on our shoulder. He's whispering in our ear, "Hey, Christian, there's work to be done. There's my work to be done. Spread the Gospel. Tell the story. Witness for Christ. Proclaim the Word. Serve the needy. Love your neighbor. Invite others to church. Put your faith into action. Let your light shine."

As followers of Jesus Christ, friends, we have his work to do. Jesus, who walked through those city walls on Good Friday – and archaeologists tell us that it was those very walls that Nehemiah and his cohorts built that were still standing at the time of Christ – Jesus died on the cross that day to save us

from our sins this day. Christ sacrificed his life, outside the city wall, for sinners everywhere. And as his church, we have his work to do. Proclaim and live the Word and love of Christ to your friends, to your neighbors, to your children, and help your church to the same. That's God's work, and he calls us all today to join in. Because only God's work in Jesus Christ can bring the lost to be found. Only God's work has eternal consequences, and brings timeless rewards. I ask you, what's more important in your life than God's work?

One of the lessons we learn from Nehemiah chapter 3 is that everyone can participate in God's work. The names of the helpers are listed, but also their occupations. They weren't all builders, or contractors. Eliashib was the high priest. Uzziel was a goldsmith. Others in the list were perfumers, priests, merchants, civic rulers, temple servants, and gatekeepers. One guy brought his daughters to work on the wall.

And then there's verse 5. Did you catch this? "And next to them the Tekoites repaired, but their nobles would not stoop to serve their Lord." Not everybody gets it. Not everybody sees what we're doing here at Hope is God's work. But it is. I pray you get it. I pray you rejoice at the opportunities we have here to do God's work. And I pray, most of all, that you are thankful for the work God has done for you, for your eternal soul, through his Son, Jesus Christ. In his name. Amen.