

“Ordinary Heroes”

Nehemiah 3:1-32

February 7, 2016

While at one particular church I went to visit a couple who had attended about 6 times.

They were middle aged, empty nesters. As I chatted with them I asked what they did for a living. The wife of the couple said that **she was working at a flower nursery, but that she was really a teacher.** As she talked a little about that, she asked whether there were any **need at the church for a Sunday School teacher.** I wasn't sure, but said that I would ask our SS Director.

When I got home I was telling Christine about my visit. **When I mentioned the teaching interest she got a bit excited.** That very morning she was with a number of women from the church, which included the SS Director. Who shared a prayer request..... **the need for a SS teacher.** I love it when a plan comes together!

We come to a portion of scripture today that may be a bit challenging, **to read and to understand.**

Let me ask, how many read through the Bible regularly?

It is very easy to get bogged down in genealogies, numbers and long lists of names, that you have trouble pronouncing.

Let me suggest Don't feel that you have to pronounce the names Try to dig out the narrative, **Pray for God's direction** Don't get bogged down, get out of it, then move on.

Find at least one thing in the chapter that speaks to you.

It is better that you proceed through, than get discouraged It is better that you seek direction from the Holy Spirit Than depend on your human abilities. **This is true even in easier portions of scripture.**

Nehemiah 3:1-12 “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. The men of Jericho built the adjoining section, and Zakkur son of Imri built next to them.

The Fish Gate was rebuilt by the sons of Hassenaah. They laid its beams and put its doors and bolts and bars in place. Meremoth son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz, repaired the next section. Next to him Meshullam son of Berekiah, the son of Meshezabel, made repairs, and next to him Zadok son of Baana also made repairs. The next section was repaired by the men of Tekoa, but their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work under their supervisors.

The Jeshanah Gate was repaired by Joiada son of Paseah and Meshullam son of Besodeiah. They laid its beams and put its doors with their bolts and bars in place. Next to them, repairs were made by men from Gibeon and Mizpah—Melatiah of Gibeon and Jadon of Meronoth—places under the authority of the governor of Trans-Euphrates. Uzziel son of Harhaiah, one of the goldsmiths, repaired the next section; and Hananiah, one of the perfume-makers, made repairs next to that. They restored Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall. Rephaiah son of Hur, ruler of a half-district of Jerusalem, repaired the next section. Adjoining this, Jedaiah son of Harumaph made repairs opposite his house, and Hattush son of Hashabneiah made repairs next to him.

Malkijah son of Harim and Hasshub son of Pahath-Moab repaired another section and the Tower of the Ovens. Shallum son of Hallohesh, ruler of a half-district of Jerusalem, repaired the next section with the help of his daughters.”

Do I get a bonus for all of those names?

If we read through these verses closely, Not being concerned about accurate pronunciation. **We see an exciting account of the work being done.**

After 150 years of oppression of the Jews **Decades of destruction of the Holy city of God** The inhabitants living in poverty & famine The People of God disheartened & disgraced **God moving the heart of the court official** – Nehemiah God convicting & moving the heart of the King of Persia The work begins! And in an exciting & enthusiastic way. **It takes the whole community to get behind the task!**

Why would God include this list?

One commentator has said, "**God is a great believer in putting names down.**" That is true. There are many chapters like this in the Scriptures. That should really encourage us. It means that **God has not forgotten our names either.** He loves to record the names of everyday people, **doing large and small tasks, which work towards His great purposes.**

Nehemiah Chapter 3 is an amazing account of the work of the people of Jerusalem & others, **to accomplish a great task.** We learn things about the people, **and how to go about God's work.**

I. God uses a variety of people, He uses everyone

These people got behind this project.

They worked for **52 days**

38 individuals are mentioned

"The Fellowship of the Unpronounceable names"

12 additional groups of people provided service

All kinds of people

Besides the individual people and families,

Men and women, from various locations.

Many mentions of religious men, including the high Priest

Goldsmiths, merchants, perfume-makers

Servants, guards & many rulers

This means – Whoever you are, strengths, weaknesses, Abilities, experience, lack of experience, rich or poor, Education level, socio-economic position, age, stage of life,

Whatever categories we can come up with –

God can use you, and He has a plan for you.

There is a task for each one in God's work!

New Testament – Paul describes the church, **people of God, as a body**

"The body is not made up of one part but many."

You have a role in the life of the church

You are important in many relationships

If you don't do it, it won't get done, or someone else will have to do it!

Imagine if there were a chapter, or a book that listed those **who worked on God's agenda at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji.** If God listed the names, the tasks and the qualities of each one who is a part of this church.

People here, music, singers instruments etc Sound, computer, Nurseries, **On various boards, committees and task forces.** Teaching, meals on Wednesday night, **Servants of Shelter**, The Food shelf, the Pregnancy Center & **list goes on.**

I have reminded you of the increased focus that is taking place in order to better identify, connect with and follow up on new people in the church. **Just for staffing the Welcome Center and connecting with new people on Sunday mornings**, we need additional people. **There are many opportunities.**

We recognize that our calling and God's plan is **not limited to what happens in this building**, or as a specific part of this ministry. We are called to be salt and light in order to impact our workplace, and our school our community. **God knows your name!**

2. The People Committed themselves to God's agenda

These people listed in chapter 3, worked towards the same goal. **They repaired and rebuilt the walls, towers and gates.**

They took a portion of the task, **fixed one gate, a small section of a wall, a tower.** As group after group and person after person tackled their particular portion, **they moved towards the completion of the corporate task.**

The work got done, because they worked towards the same goal. They worked side by side About 20 times the phrase "next to them" or just "next" **People don't always get together,**

There may be differences in – **perspective, values, preferences,** Thought process, approach, money, experience, background, comfort level & zone. **Many things that can cause 2 people or groups to clash, at least rub the wrong way.**

When there is a common goal, & **led by God's agenda** can overlook those things.

There are a lot of negative things could happen **They could argue about what kind of brick to use** Argue – who will do what **How high will it be? The shape of the gates?**

To be productive, and to accomplish God's work, we must work in unity. **We see the idea of unity in the body of Christ affirmed many times in the New Testament.** (Ephesians 4:3-6 NIV) "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called-- one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

It was not easy work. For almost 2 months these people dropped whatever else they were doing **in order to daily climb on a wall and work.** It was sweaty, back-breaking, hard labor, not glamorous stuff.

They sacrificed, **time, energy, resources, maybe even their own perspective** of how it should be done, and when.

When we give ourselves over to God's Agenda, we give up ourselves totally. **It is not my agenda, my preference or my perspective that is important.** I may or may not have the opportunity for that input. Be am willing to work whether I do or not.

The people of Jerusalem, **and those from outside**, lived with things for a long time, as they were. They were making significant changes, and sacrifices **In order to accomplish this new project.**

God's work is worth doing, worth doing well, worth giving our all!

Not everyone in town appreciated what Nehemiah was challenging them to accomplish. **Vs. 5 "But the Nobles of Tekoa would not put their shoulders to the work under their supervisors."** Only one example of this lack of involvement. There are other mentions in **chapter 2 & 4** of opposition. Begin to look at that next week.

The building for the church that I served in Duluth was **built in the early part of the last century**. For a building that was more than 70 years old, it was actually in pretty good shape. But, it seemed like there was **always something that needed to be fixed**.

It had steam heat. In the lower level of the building, the heating pipes ran under the concrete floor. In the winter, if you walked across the Fellowship Hall in bare feet, **you could feel the heat of the water through the concrete floor**.

This was interesting, even comfortable, **until, a puddle began to form**. It seems as though the old pipes had actually deteriorated. The water eventually worked its way up through the concrete. **It needed to be repaired**.

There were men in the church who were very handy and experienced in all forms of construction. **The Trustees decided that they could do the repair themselves**. It was quite a project. Between 3 to 6 men would be at the church every day. They began by busting through the concrete floor. Then there were a couple of men who were **experienced plumbers who repaired the pipes**.

While replacing pipes they found that **some repair work needed to be done to the boiler**. We were happy that it didn't need to be replaced.

Some of the women of the church would make sure that there was **coffee, baked goods and lunch available every day**. This part of the task lasted a number of weeks. Eventually new concrete was poured, but of course, then there needed to be new tile. It was actually a **different group of 4 men from the church who came in and laid the tile**.

With a new floor it was decided that the **walls needed to be painted**, that was a different crew, **it included a couple of the women of the church**. The nursery was connected to the Fellowship Hall, and of course that had to be updated in order to go along with the new lower level. **The entire project took about 6 weeks to complete**. I no longer remember the number of workers and food providers, and very few names. **But God does**.

It was a blessing in disguise as we ended up with a brand new Fellowship Hall and Nursery. **God's people came together to accomplish this task, and the ministry continues today**.

There are physical tasks in the life of a church. **Along with a great variety of ministries inside and outside of the church building**. There are official programs and events, as well as informal opportunities to assist people and impact their lives. **We don't participate for the recognition**, but I believe God keeps track. And that there is a spot for each one. **What is yours?**