

“Everybody’s Got a Job” // Nehemiah 2:17–3:32 // Nehemiah # 3¹

Introduction

Open your Bibles to Nehemiah chapter 2... And let’s stand, if you will, for the reading of God’s Word.

Nehemiah 2:17: “Then I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision.”

[3:1] Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests, and they built the Sheep Gate. They consecrated it and set its doors... [2] And next to him the men of Jericho built. And next to them Zaccur the son of Imri built.

[3] The sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate. They laid its beams and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars. [4] And next to them Meremoth the son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz repaired. And next to them Meshullam the son of Berechiah, son of Meshezabel repaired. And next to them Zadok the son of Baana repaired. [5] And next to them the Tekoites repaired, but their nobles would not stoop to serve their Lord.

6 Joiada the son of Paseah and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah repaired the Gate of Yeshanah... 7 And next to them repaired Melatiah the Gibeonite and Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon and of Mizpah, the seat of the governor of the province Beyond the River. 8 Next to them Uzziel the son of Harhaiah, goldsmiths, repaired. Next to him Hananiah, one of the perfumers, repaired, and they restored Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall. 9 Next to them Rephaiah the son of Hur, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, repaired. 10 Next to them Jedaiah the son of Harumaph repaired opposite his house. And next to him Hattush the son of Hashabneiah repaired. 11 Malchijah the son of Harim and Hasshub the son of Pahath-moab repaired another section and the Tower of the Ovens. 12 Next to him Shallum the son of Hallohesh, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, repaired, he and his daughters.

And all God’s people said... *WHAT?? WHAT IN THE WORLD ARE WE SUPPOSED TO GET OUT OF A LIST OF NAMES LIKE THAT?*

¹ Sources consulted: Eric Mason, *Nehemiah for You*, (London, UK: The Good Book Company, 2022); Andy Stanley, *Visioneering*, (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 1999); Tim Keller, “[Laboring for a God who Fights for Us](#)”, June 28, 2014, The Gospel Coalition’s National Women’s Conference; Skip Heitzig, “[Extreme Makeover: Jerusalem Edition](#)”, April 20, 2005, Calvary Church. And others as noted throughout.

Great question.

Leader: This is the Word of God for the people of God.

People: *Thanks be to God.*

You may be seated.

It can be difficult to figure out what to do with a passage like this one. How many of you have **had the experience of getting into a Bible reading plan**—you’re all amped up; this is going to be the year you read through the Bible, and everything is going great, and then you hit a list like this one—and it’s like when you were a kid and you’re running along the beach at full speed, and you hit the water... and it feels like you’re trying to run through wet cement. So many resolutions to read the Bible through die in the lists of names in Leviticus, amen? Other people are talking about their quiet times and how much they’re getting out of it with tears in their eyes and you’re like, “I’ve been reading about a bunch of Meremoths who begat some Meshullams... and I’m pretty sure I fell asleep somewhere in the list and I’ve gotten ZERO edification out of my quiet time the last few days.”

I freely admit to you that I start skimming when I get to lists of names like this in my Bible reading--and (brace yourself) I think that’s fine. I don’t feel guilty about that *AT ALL*. **BUT**... these lists do serve important purposes in the Bible and you should understand what those purposes are. And then after you understand the purpose, you can skim a little.

Let me first remind you historically what is going on. Nehemiah, as I hope you recall, is the third leader in a **3-wave restoration project (-->-->-->)** God was bringing to his people.

- **The first wave was led by Zerubbabel.** Zerubbabel had overseen the rebuilding of the Temple and the restoration of public worship. That took place in 538 BC and is recorded in the first half of the book of Ezra.
- **The second wave was led by Ezra who reacquainted the people with the Word of God.** He literally read the Word over the people, explained it to them and called them to obey it.²
- **Finally, we have Nehemiah, who in 445 BC** leads in the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem—walls that will give the city an identity and restore order to it and allow economic and civic life to flourish again.
- One reformer I haven’t mentioned yet, who works alongside these guys is **Esther**. Esther served as Queen in Persia, in the very place Nehemiah served. In fact, some scholars suggest that the queen listed in **Nehemiah 2:6** was Esther. Esther had been married to King Artaxerxes father and was the queen of the realm, and it’s possible she was still alive even after her husband had passed. The fact that Nehemiah mentions the presence of the queen on the throne seemingly randomly in Nehemiah 2:6 suggests that the queen had some kind of special significance to him. So, it could be Esther. Either way, Queen Esther’s part in this whole restoration project was to protect her fellow Israelites from a horrendous act of racial genocide. That story is recorded, of course, in the book of Esther.

² This takes place about 458 BC.

Now, why do I point ALL of this out to you? Because it leads us to our first point:

(1) God's plan of restoration involves spiritual awakening, economic flourishing, and social reform.

Spiritual renewal came through Zerubbabel and Ezra; the renewal of economic structures and engines came with Nehemiah, and through Esther working in the civil government against racial injustice and discrimination. Tim Keller says, "Here you have male and female, lay and clergy. You have people working for spiritual maturity, economic flourishing, and better public policy, in cultures that defined and valued these ideas differently from the Jews. God uses them all in his restoration project."³

God calls different ones of us to activity in all three, and wherever the gospel is preached, renewal comes to all three. **The spiritual always comes first.** Tony Evans points out this is what made the Civil Rights movement effective. The Civil Rights movement in our country wasn't perfect, he says, not by a long shot, but the movement leaders almost always prayed before they marched and they always put God and his commands about justice at the center of everything, which gave the movement not only a grander purpose but also a lasting permanence.⁴

But, Tony Evans says, they didn't stop with the spiritual. I'll say it again: Wherever the gospel is preached, social reforms follow and economic flourishing is the result.

- There's **an economist named Barry Asmus** who co-wrote a book with theologian Wayne Grudem called *The Poverty of Nations*, in which they demonstrate that in societies where the populace adopts a Christian worldview, human and economic flourishing has consistently been the result. Because, they say, the Christian worldview is an expression of God's design, so it shouldn't surprise us that we flourish when we operate according to it. We're operating the machine according to the Owner's Manual, duh. **Now, some of you say, "Well, of course they think that; they're Christians."**
- But see, they're not alone in their finding. There's a NYT author named **Nicolas Kristoff** who writes a lot about human progress and ending human rights abuses around the world. Nicolas Kristoff is an atheist, but in this fascinating article I was reading, he said that wherever he went in the world studying social reform, he couldn't get over the fact that just about EVERYWHERE he found social reform, he found Christians at the center. Hospitals, non-profits, empowerment programs in poor neighborhoods ... over and over, it was Christians who were driving the work. In fact, he said, it drove him nuts, because he was trying to convince *secular* people to care for the poor, but he had to admit that Christians had a centuries-long head start on him.
- **Noted British Historian Tom Holland says the same things. Again, Tom Holland is not a professed believer** (btw, I'm not talking about Spiderman, but this historian Tom Holland). But Tom Holland says, look through the best parts of our history, and you'll find Christianity at the center of our best social reforms. The abolition of slavery, the rise of women's suffrage, child labor laws; universities, hospitals, the social safety net—those leading the way in these things were Christians.

³ Tim Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*

⁴ Tony Evans

What's my point? My point is that just because you're not called to do what I do--to work in the church--doesn't mean you don't have a role in manifesting Christ's kingdom. The gospel will send many of you out into these areas. You may not be called to be an Ezra like me; but you might be called to work like Nehemiah building the infrastructure in society, or like Esther in bringing social reforms.

Now, I do pray that for a lot of you--particularly you young adults or those of you in college--I pray that God will call a lot of you into church leadership. I've told you, the #1 predictor of any Christian movement in history is how many young men and women they are raising up into ministry, so I want us to do that well.⁵ Honestly, one of my pet peeves is when people think that all the great leaders should go into business or government or law where they can make a lot of money or make a real difference and those who can't cut it in those arenas should go into church work. Sure, I'll admit, this profession is not the most lucrative profession--but I think some of the greatest leaders in the world should be going into God's church. I mean, what a calling! What a privilege! BUT--my point is, not all of you will be called to lead in the church, but that doesn't mean God doesn't have a place for you in manifesting his kingdom.

Again: **(1) God's plan of restoration involves spiritual awakening, economic flourishing, and social reform.**

This is a core teaching principle at The Summit Church. In fact, it's one of the core themes of my book, *Everyday Revolutionary*. God's plan for bringing renewal is more than what I do up here in the pulpit. It starts here--but it unfolds through you in the community.

In fact, I've pointed out to you: 39 out of 40 miracles in the book of Acts happen outside the church. Outside the church! I've told you that as someone who works inside the church, that means I only have access to 1/40th of the Holy Spirit's available power. That's not great hermeneutics, I know, but you get the point. Ask most people in church today to talk about some moment where they experienced the power of God, and they'll point to a moment in the pastor's sermon where they got the warm fuzzies or a moment in the worship when they really got emotional. And praise God for anointed preaching and Spirit-filled worship, but I'm telling you, 39/40 of what God wants to do is not through me in the pulpit but through you in the community.

Or how about this? I've pointed out to you that the first time the phrase "filled with the Spirit" is used in the Bible is in Exodus 31: "The LORD said to Moses, "See, I have called by name Bezalel... and I have filled him with the Spirit of God (to)... " To... WHAT? To preach? To write worship songs? To pray in tongues? No. "...I have filled him with the Spirit of God with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft."⁶

"Filled with the Spirit" to be... an interior designer? **Get your mind around that:** The first time the phrase "filled with the Spirit" is used in the Bible, it's about a man's artistic ability, not his preaching or praying ability.

⁵ Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America*

⁶ Ex 31:1-5

(1) God's plan of restoration involves spiritual awakening, economic flourishing, and social reform.

That leads me to...

(2) God's plan of restoration involves everyone

When you read the list in chapter 3, what stands out is the repetition of the words "next to." "Next to" Eliashib were the sons of Hassenaah and "next to" them Meremoth and "next to" him were Shallum and his daughters..." All working on different parts of the wall, most right out in front of their houses. Commentators tell us the point of this list is showing us that everyone was involved.

Scholars say Nehemiah is the culmination of a progression we've seen throughout the Old Testament. At the beginning, God brought his plan through select individuals. A spiritual superhero type like Moses or Joshua or Samson--but here, at the tail end of the Old Testament, we're seeing God use everyone in Israel to bring about his kingdom. One of the things that is significant about Nehemiah 3 is what it *doesn't* say. It doesn't say, "Nehemiah did this and then Nehemiah did that," but, rather, "this rando over here you've never heard of did this and this lady over here did that and this guy's daughters were working on this." **Everyone** had a role in restoring Jerusalem.

This **transition--this democratization of the mission**--continues on into the New Testament. In Acts 2, Peter says that in these last days God's Spirit has been poured out on "all flesh" and "your sons and daughters will prophesy." You see, in the Old Testament, it was only special, selected individuals who prophesied--people with names like Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Habakkuk. But now, Peter says, the Spirit of prophecy is given to all believers. **Everyone** has a spot on the wall, something they are responsible for.

YOU have a role. Hear me: In the kingdom of God, there's no such thing as a passive consumer. It's like our friend David Platt says, "God didn't save you so he could sanitize you and set you on a sanctified shelf; he saved you to send you into service." A Christian who has not embraced his or her role in the mission has not fully started to follow Jesus.

I tell you this all the time: the call to get involved in the mission of God is not a secondary call you receive from Jesus--where he appears to you like he did to Moses at a burning bush and says to you, "Now, I want you to start serving me." No, the call to get involved in the mission was *included* in the call to follow Jesus. **Matthew 4:19**, Jesus said, "**Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.**" Which means when you accepted the call to follow Jesus, you accepted the call to mission. There's no such thing as a person following Jesus who is not engaged in the mission. Engaging in the mission is what it means to follow Jesus!

Thus, we say: **The question is no longer if you are called, only where and how.** Every one of you is responsible to consider how God designed you; to think about what gifts he's given you, what experiences he's led you through--how he's written your story--and then discern from that what he wants you to do with that in his kingdom. **The question is no longer if you're called, only where and how.**

I've told you before how God called me. It really didn't come through a Damascus Road or burning bush experience. It came through a transformation in how I understood that call. **I was a junior in college.** I was pursuing a law degree (I was good at it; thought I could make a lot of money doing it), and I thought, "Well, if God wants me to do something for his kingdom, he'll tell me."

- My pastor had challenged me to read Romans seven times, and one morning in my quiet time, I was reading the book of Romans and I don't know how to fully describe this, but it just became real to me what it meant for people to die without Jesus... and the fact there were 2.2 billion....what I knew in my head, I felt in my heart.
- And I remember having this image in my mind... Railroad tracks. And it just crushed me.
- So, I said, "Lord, please let me do something about that. LORD, SHOW ME WHAT I CAN DO. Here am I, Lord, send me!" And I sensed the Lord saying, "Now, at last, you're praying the right prayer."
- You see, I'd been sitting around passively praying, "God, if you want to do something in my life, show me in a burning bush," when what God wanted me doing was actively praying, "Lord, show me how my life can best be used for the spread of the gospel, because that's the most urgent thing in the world."
 - We talk about finding God's will--it's not lost! (2 Peter 3:9)
 - Jim Elliot: "You don't need to sit around waiting on a VOICE when you've already been given a VERSE."

All believers should be asking God how their talents and gifts can best be used bringing Christ's kingdom to earth. We should go from a passive willingness to serve in God's mission to an active quest to figure out what God has put in our hearts and our hands.

The question is no longer IF you're called; it's only where and how.

So, what's your role? What do you see? One of the things Pastor Dustin, our young adults pastor here, showed to me is that a lot of these people mentioned here in Nehemiah 3 had been living in Jerusalem for 50 years, and they'd gotten used to the broken-down walls. They walked past them every day and didn't even think about them. Maybe **YOU'VE** gotten used to broken-down walls in our city.

- Listen to this: AT MOST, the max number of people involved in any significant way in church in the Triangle is **56%**. And that's been really, really generous with what it means to be involved in a church. I mean, drive down your street at 9:30 and see how many people aren't going to church, and you know it's not 56% of people in the Triangle who go to church. So that means at least 44% of the people in the Triangle aren't Christians. With a population of 2.4 million, that means there are AT LEAST a million people here who don't know Jesus. Have you just gotten used to that? Are you ok with that number of people going into a Christless eternity? When we push you to invite people to Easter, this is not a vanity project for us pastors. It is because literally hundreds of thousands of our neighbors are lost and need Jesus. Parts of our city are spiritual rubble.
- People always ask me: Pastor, when are you going to stop pushing The Summit Church to grow? When is enough, enough? And I say, "When there's not a million lost people still in the Triangle, that's when." I always say to these people, "Why are you so focused on the size of our church AND NOT on the number of lost people in our community?" We're not trying to build an empire here--we're trying to reach a city. We're not trying to grow a megachurch; we're trying to reach a megacity. We send out people all the time to plant churches--we give our resources, our people, and our money to OTHER churches sometimes. But we're never going to try to stop growing here. People say, "Yeah, you're into

growth; you're all about numbers." I say, "Absolutely. I'm into numbers of people saved. Numbers of marriages restored. Numbers of addicts delivered..." I always say, "You know who loves a growing church? That parent of the prodigal son whom they've been praying for for years and he has just started to come to our church; or that wife who has been praying for her husband for years and he has just started to come. They're grateful that we've grown our church and created room for "ONE MORE.""

Everyone has a role, and there's plenty to do. By the way, this chapter comes with a subtle-but-severe warning. Look at **(3:5) And next to them the Tekoites repaired, but their nobles would not stoop to serve their Lord.**

- In every church, including this one, there is a group of people who think they're too important to get their hands dirty, who enjoy the show but don't want to help build the wall.
- I've known people here who told me y'all, straight up, they weren't working in the kids' ministry. One married guy with kids actually told me, "I don't want to volunteer in kids ministry; let the single people do that." I was like, "Get out of here." My son, Adon, uses a phrase I love. He says: ***"If serving is beneath you, leadership is beyond you."***
- Vs 5 shows you that God takes note of those who do not serve. This also happened in Judges when Deborah summoned the people to war and there was a certain clan that just sat by the sidelines. After the battle was over, the Holy Spirit inspired Deborah to say, ***"Curse Meroz, says the angel of the Lord; curse its inhabitants thoroughly, because they did not come to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty"*** (Judges 5:23).
- Might I graciously ask: If God made a list of those engaged in ministry here at Summit, how many of us would have an epithet like this?
- Don't be the elders of Meroz or the nobles of the Tekoites. Every person who considers this church home should be involved in some way in sacrificial serving and giving.
- (And, by the way, one more thing: Did you notice that for a lot of these people, what they were doing was clearly outside their skill set? Vs 8 talks about perfume makers. These guys weren't making scented candles, "Serenity by Jan." No, they were carrying bricks. Listen, it's great to find a ministry that fits your passions and skills, and I want to help you do that, but when the kids' class is closed because of a lack of leaders, well, someone's not getting to hear the gospel. The Israelites came together, with their focus on the task, to get the job done!)
- We end every service here with the phrase, "YOU ARE SENT." Do you know what that means? Or do you just think, "He's sending me to my car" or "He's sending us to lunch"? That's not what we mean. Do you know where he's sent you in the mission? He's sent you to serve both in the church and in the community!

(3) In God's plan of restoration, he rarely uses experts

If you look at the list Nehemiah gives in chapter 3, what stands out is that none of these people were... BUILDERS! There were priests, priests' helpers, goldsmiths, perfume makers, someone's teenage daughters, administrative bureaucrats and paper pushers--but not a single professional architect, carpenter or brick-layer was named.⁸

⁷ I get the phrase 'One more!' from our friend Joby Martin!

⁸ from *Daktar*: Viggie Olson

Get your mind around this--and those of you going to Jerusalem with us in the summer will get to see this firsthand--the most sacred city in the world; the city fought over more than any other in history--was built by a bunch of people with no building or construction experience! At least the walls weren't.

God builds his greatest things through ordinary people. Always. That's a theme that runs all the way through your Bible. He built his church not with 12 scholars or 12 lawyers or 12 accomplished governmental leaders--he used 12 fishermen and blue collar workers.

I think we're always inspired when we see a secular illustration of this. **For example**, the greatest actor of all time is... Nicolas Cage, of course. But, the 2nd greatest of all time is... Harrison Ford. And I think one of the things I love most about Harrison Ford is his origin story. True story: In the late 1960s, Harrison Ford had some bit parts in a couple of shows like *Gunsmoke*, but nothing that paid very much. He was basically a Hollywood extra, and because he had a family to support, a wife and two young sons, he taught himself carpentry. Well, he got hired to build a door for George Lucas' office on the set of *Star Wars*,⁹ and during the casting session, George Lucas needed someone who could read lines opposite the auditioning actors. In other words, someone to be a stand-in the real actors could play off. So he asked this rando cabinet-building guy to come read a few lines with these actors, and the rest is history.

That's an amazing and rare story in Hollywood, but it's standard fare in the kingdom of God. **God uses ordinary people, not spiritual superstars, to build his kingdom.** Here's an example I often use to prove this.

- Bible Trivia: **According to Jesus, Matthew 11:11, who was the best preacher ever to live?** John the Baptist (podcasted; WWJtB do?). Here's what he said, **Matthew 11:11: "Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."**
- **...No longer about your ability, but your availability**
- God chooses ordinary people to do his greatest work. Stop saying, "God, I'm not trained. I can't do anything to help." God says, "You're exactly who I choose, because it's not about what you are building for me, but what I am building *through* you. In fact, I'd prefer you not be that talented because then, you'd try to take all the credit and be convinced your ideas are as good as mine, and you'll just clog up the line. I want to use people who plainly recognize that the power comes from me."
 - **1 Corinthians 1:27 says:** "God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; what is low and despised in the world to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God."
 - I remember hearing the great Southern Baptist pastor Adrian Rogers giving an amazing illustration of this--I've never forgotten it. He pastored a congregation of several thousand and asked them one Sunday morning... Valedictorian; scholarship; all-American athlete. He basically went through a bunch of "who's who" type of acknowledgments. When he got done, about 1/3 of the congregation was standing. He had everybody clap and then he said, "For those of you standing, I've got good news and bad news. The good news is, *God can use you, TOO*... the bad news is you're not his first choice. The people seated next to you are."

God uses weak and broken people! Which leads me to our last point...

⁹ "[Harrison Ford's First Experience](#)," Slashfilm.com

(4) God restores his city through instruments of grace

Keep in mind the people you are reading about in this list were the sons and daughters of people who had been exiled in Babylon because of their sin.

They had a checkered past, to say the least. Their families had been so unfaithful and unbelieving God had kicked them out of the Promised Land. Maybe you can relate. Maybe you have a sordid past, or maybe you come from a messed-up family, or maybe you are simply aware of what goes on between your ears throughout the week and you wonder, “How could God ever use someone like me?” Broken. Needy. Prone to wander. I’ve got good news: *God builds his church only through bad, broken, messed-up people--BECAUSE that’s the only kind of people there are.*

Matthew makes the same point through a similar list of names he gives us. It’s the genealogy of Jesus he gives us in Matthew 1. I’m going to read it to you, but I want to try to take you through the emotional arc that Jewish people would have gone through when they read this list of names for the first time. I’m going to have you, as an audience, reflect their emotional arc.

Here’s how it’s gonna work. I’m going to read the genealogy, and when I give you **THUMBS UP**, that means the Jewish people felt mostly positive about the person I list, and so I want you to respond with **APPLAUSE**. When I give you THUMBS DOWN, that means they were embarrassed by this person, so you boo or hiss, preferably both. And when I give you WAFLING HAND, I want you to say, “huhhhh?” because that means you don’t have any idea who this person is and probably neither did they.

(Keep in mind, this is not our verdict on their lives, or **God’s** verdict, because there’s a lot more to their stories than what you first see. I’m simply going to take you through the most likely emotional arc Matthew’s audience would have gone on when they first read it.)

OK, wanna practice? This is for everybody at all campuses-- Chapel Hill? North Durham? Blue Ridge? Garner? Everybody ready? THUMBS UP/ THUMBS DOWN / WAFLING HAND

(BTW, this may not work. But I’m gonna try it.)

This is the list of the ancestors of Jesus Christ (UP), **a descendant of David who was a descendant of Abraham** (UP). (That’s a strong start!)

Abraham was the father of Isaac, a child born miraculously in Abraham’s old age (UP); **and Isaac was the father of Jacob**--the man who entered the Messianic bloodline by stealing his brother’s birthright (DOWN)

Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers, who sold Joseph into slavery (DOWN).

and Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar (the one who disguised herself as a prostitute and seduced Judah, who was her father-in-law, to impregnate her with Perez and Zerah) (that's a big DOWN) **and Perez was the father of Hezron and Hezron the father of Ram, and Ram the father of Amminidab.** (WAFFLE)

And Amminidab was the father of Nahshon, who was the father of Salmon who was the father of Boaz by Rahab, another prostitute (DOWN), but a woman brave enough to defy her entire community and choose God when all of Israel was acting like a bunch of cowards(UP)

And Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth, a great woman whose story is told in a book of the Bible bearing her name. (UP)

And Obed was the father of Jesse, who was the father of David, the greatest King of Israel. (UP) Except that David also stole Uriah's wife and had him killed (DOWN).

David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah who was the father of Rehoboam, whose stupidity led to a divided kingdom (DOWN) **and Rehoboam was the father of Abijah, who had fourteen wives.** (Ladies? DOWN)

And Abijah was the father of Asa, a good king but later disobeyed God and died of gangrene of the feet. (DOWN)

Asa was the father Hezekiah, who cleansed the temple and re-established the kingdom. (UP) **and Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh,** who ruled for 50 years (UP), but was evil for most of that time (DOWN), **and Manasseh was the father of Zerubbabel,** who rebuilt the Temple! (UP)

and Zerubbabel was the father of Abiud (WAFFLE), **the father of Achim** (WAFFLE), **the father of Eliud** (WAFFLE), **the father of Eleazar** (WAFFLE), **the father of Matthan** (WAFFLE), **the father of** (another) **Jacob** (WAFFLE).

And that Jacob was the father of Joseph the carpenter (UP), **who was the husband of the Virgin Mary** (UP), **of whom was born Jesus the Christ, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords!** (UP!!!)

You get the point?

God takes all kinds of people and transforms them into his instruments of grace. People look at you and see a messed-up person; a moral failure; someone whose life was a mistake, maybe a series of mistakes; an adulterer, a washout, a prostitute, a prisoner, a nobody--but God sees someone he plans to use to build an eternal city and leave a legacy that will impact lives forever.

Let me say it plainly for you guys in the back: **God has a plan for your life! He wants to use you!** Look at that person next to you! He wants to use them! That person next to you is amazing! He wants to use them to do ETERNAL things. Reach over and touch them. They're special.

(And, all it takes is simple, ordinary, acts of obedience.)

Here's how I want to close: **I want us to zoom out again and see Nehemiah's book from the perspective of the whole Bible.** This is not primarily about Nehemiah putting up some brick and mortar on a piece of real estate in the Middle East. No, the book of Nehemiah is ultimately about a greater Nehemiah who would come and build an eternal city, a city of salvation. There's a strong hit of that right at the end of chapter 2. Look at **vs 20**: Some outsiders come to Nehemiah, some foreigners come to Nehemiah and say, "What are you doing?"

"Then I replied to them, 'The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem.'" The wording of this is striking to me. "You, foreigners, you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem." But hadn't God promised that Jerusalem would one day be a blessing to all the world and that foreigners from every nation would come to it and find their salvation and refuge in it? Yes, he had. This is clearly not the Jerusalem God had in mind, at least not the ultimate version of it.

The real Jerusalem, the real Temple, would be born into a manger 400 years later. He would not turn away foreigners, but would say to them, "Come unto me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

The Jerusalem that Nehemiah built was one he fought to keep closed to outsiders; the Jerusalem Jesus built is one Jesus died to open up. Nehemiah built walls to keep the impure out of Jerusalem; Jesus tore them down so that whosoever will may come.

You see, the truth is: The verdict on all of us was THUMBS DOWN... but Jesus built a "city," so to speak, where we could be saved by grace.

Here's what the gospel is: You'll never be righteous enough, pure enough, good enough, to earn God's favor. No, Jesus offers you his righteousness as a gift, purchased for you at the cross. It's called "gift-righteousness," meaning it's not righteousness you earn for yourself by being good enough but righteousness God gives you as a gift, purchased for you by Jesus Christ. After you receive gift-righteousness, that's followed by gift-power--power in the Spirit that doesn't come from your efforts but from him--again, as a gift. These things are available to all who would receive them, but they can only be received as gifts.

Are you ready to receive Christ's righteousness if you never have, and then receive Christ's power and purpose for your life? It's time for you to stop building your own city and give yourself to this eternal city he's building.

We're going to end today by taking the Lord's Table: **COMMUNION**