

Nehemiah 1-3

Sunday 9/14/2003

I have enjoyed the book of Nehemiah. We are going to be in Nehemiah for maybe another month or so. I am going to talk about all the different aspects, but I never want to do something for the sake of doing it. So be thinking about what you would want me to teach and preach on after we are done with the study of Nehemiah. You can come up and tell me and put a little bug in my ear and tell me what you would like. If I get enough people to say the same thing, we will do it, or if God just speaks to my heart, that is what you need to do. I am always looking for what you think and what you want. When I am preaching, I am preaching for you and for me, and as a body, we need to have what God wants us to have.

I believe firmly that everybody is important here. Everybody's opinion is important of where we are going. I know that this is a great spiritual bunch here. When we joke and laugh and talk, we have fun together, which is fun. But I know that the bottom line is that there is a great spiritual depth to this body here, and I thank God for that. So I lean very heavily on what you suggest or what you say and listen to everything that everybody tells me. So be thinking about that, where you want to go, what do you want to do? I have some ideas, but I want to do what God wants us to do. So think about it, pray about it, and then let me know what you think.

I. The Significance of Nehemiah and the Church

The book of Nehemiah, as you have been well aware, we have been rebuilding the walls here, rebuilding, putting the gates back up in Nehemiah chapter 3 and chapter 4. We chose the book of Nehemiah because the book of Nehemiah is such an interesting book as far as showing us what we need to have as a church.

Nehemiah was written hundreds and hundreds of years ago, and it is about a time period long before the church ever came into effect. But yet we also know from the Bible that the Bible is a unique book, that everything in the Old Testament usually foreshadows something that is going to take place in the New Testament. We know that the city of Jerusalem in the Old Testament was the city of God. We know that Jerusalem was the focal point of God's plan. We see it under Solomon, where all the world is coming in to see the glory under Solomon, and we know that they went into that city through these gates.

We know that now Jerusalem lies desolate. It is under Gentile domination. The time that the Gentiles have come in, and the nation of Israel is in a real mess. We see that the gates are off the hinges. The walls are torn down. When we see Nehemiah goes back, the first thing that he does is repair those gates because those gates are imperative to the plan of God.

In the New Testament scenario, we know that there is no city that is the central focal point of God, but God works through a local church. God's plan is a local church. But within that local church are individual bodies of Christ, the temples of Christ, and you and me. We make up that. In the Old Testament, as I have said many times, all the world comes to the city to worship, the temple to worship. In the New Testament, we take our temple to the world. That is why we have missions. That is why our job is to train young men and young ladies, moms and dads, in the

Word of God, that God will send them out wherever they need to go. We start in our own city, winning people to Christ, telling them the story of Christ, and then branching out as God leads us from there.

I have some great concepts for our missions program as far as a missionary that you are all going to love, and we will talk about it in time as God gives us. God has given us just everything we need. Have you ever noticed how He has provided everything? He put this building. We are up here. We did not have a piano player. He gave us a piano player. We did not even have a piano. He gave us a piano. God has just given us everything that we need. It is just great. That is the way He does. You are going to see that today.

We have talked about the nine gates, those nine gates representing what this church needs to have, because people came in through those gates. Each one of them represents something different that this church needs to offer to people. But those gates are all outward. People went into the city through them. Today we are going to talk about what is behind the scenes. For everything that God does outward, there is an inward. For every outward movement, there is an inward. Whatever you do outwardly, the Bible says, "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" because of something inward. If you do something right for God, it is not because you are such a great person.

I hear people at a time get up and introduce people to preach, and they always say, "Well, you know, I want to hear this as a great man of God." I understand what they are saying, but let me just tell you the truth. There are no great men of God. There are just common ordinary men who are used by a great God. I am not fighting anybody, and I know honor to whom honor is due, but let us state with the reality of things here. For anything somebody does outwardly, we would say, "Wow, what a great thing." You know why? It is because of something inward.

I do not know if you have ever noticed that in the Bible or not. When you look at the Ten Commandments, you realize that there are four that are inward to God, and then there are six with outward demand. Everything is that way. You as a Christian, you have an inward man and an outward man. We call it the old nature and the new nature. For everything that is good or bad, whatever the case, outwardly, it started from something inwardly.

Today I want to look at these nine gates from a different perspective. We have looked at them outwardly. We have looked at them as they are portrayed in the Bible, as nine openings in this wall where people go in. We have seen the spiritual application to it. But now I want to talk to you behind the scenes. Something was taking place behind the scenes here that made a difference. Something took place behind the scenes that changes the perspective and gives us an understanding of what God is doing outwardly. To miss what God was doing inwardly and only focus on what God is doing outwardly is a terrible mistake for us because we need to see the source.

We have heard this phrase before. You have heard it for years. I have preached it for a long time, but it is a true statement. Churches come in two categories: you have works that are of God, and you have works that are for God. I do not want to work here for God. I want to work here of God. A work of God suggests that whatever is outward is because of whatever is inward. I think

that starting the book in Nehemiah, we do a great injustice if we look at the gates and the walls and see all the outward stuff, but do not take time to look at what was behind the scenes inwardly.

I want to begin reading here in chapter 1 and read a couple of verses. We are going to kind of jump around in these couple of chapters here, but bear with me here.

Nehemiah 1:1-4

The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace, That Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire. And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven,

Notice how he puts the end and all that he says, the one thing that he gets specific about is the walls and the gates. They are important.

Now Father, we thank You and praise You for all You do. We love You so much. We thank You for those that are here today. We thank You for the time that we can spend in studying Your Word. We ask You today to give us an insight, Father, behind the scenes. Lord, we have seen this picture of Jerusalem and the walls. We know what it means to our church. We know that our church needs to have these things in place, that people will give us a way to get saved, that people would be able to come in and be nurtured and be given all that God wants them to have. But Lord, we need to look beyond that now. We need to look and see and understand what went on behind the scenes that made this possible. Because that is the difference for a church that is a work of God than a church that is a work for God. Help us today, Father, in all that we do. We will thank You and praise You. In Jesus' name, we ask it. Amen.

II. The Burden of God's Man

There are a number of things that I want to look at here today and we want to come to light as you read this. The first thing I want you to see as we look deeper at what God is doing here is that God has a group of men. God has a group of men here, and I am sure women too. God has a group of men here built around a man, and that man is Nehemiah. The first thing that we need to understand is behind the scenes is that Nehemiah has a burden. He has a burden. God's man or God's men, whatever you are going to do, you have to have a burden. We all know that. If you would say that to the average person, they would say, "Well, that is no revelation. I understand what a burden is," but I am going to talk to you about it in a greater depth because I want you to see what is taking place here.

Look at chapter 1 again. It says down here, "Hanani, one of my brethren, came he and certain men of Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews that escaped and they were left in captivity

and concerning Jerusalem. And they said unto me, The remnant that are left in captivity, they were in the province in great affliction and reproach, and the walls are broken down." He says in verse 4, "And it came to pass when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept and mourned certain days and fasted and prayed before the God of Heaven."

The Bible says in Proverbs 29:18, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." The vision goes along with the burden. The problem is you talk to the average Christian today, you say, "Do you have a burden?" They say, "Yeah." "Do you have a vision?" They say, "Yeah." When you read Nehemiah chapter 1 from the surface here, if I would ask you what you got here, somebody would say to me, "Well, you have got Nehemiah's burden here. Nehemiah is laying out his burden." But that is not exactly true. What we have here is not just Nehemiah laying out his burden. What we have got here is Nehemiah laying out God's burden. That is the difference.

It does you and me no good to have a burden if it is not God's burden. We can get burdened by all kinds of things. The question is, do you even know what God's burden is today? Somebody says, "Well, it is for lost souls. It is for this and for that." Hey, get specific. Do you understand in your life the burden that God has given you or the lack of burden God has given you? Because Nehemiah, as you study him here, he only wants what God wants. He does not have any personal agenda. We live in a day and age where everybody has something they want for themselves. "I will get a burden for God, but I want this out of it." Nehemiah does not come to God that way. He comes to God with God's burden.

It always struck me as how in the world did he really get God's burden? Here is a time and place where God really is not writing anything. God is not coming down and talking to anybody like He did in the Old Testament. We are about to end up with God's burden. He is going to enter that 400 silent years where God does not give any revelation to anybody till Christ shows up. Here is a man, as you read it, that has got a burden. It is very obvious. It moves him to the place where he weeps. He sits down and he weeps, and then he begins to pray. But his burden is so clearly understood, if you know anything about the Bible at all, that he just did not have a burden. He had God's burden. That is what makes the difference. As I said before, it does me no good to have a burden. If you have a burden for whatever, if it is not God's burden, there is a process you and I have to go through in our life to grow to the point spiritually that you make sure that your burden that you have is the same burden that God has got.

III. The Prayer of God's Man

The next thing I see down through here, God's man has to have a prayer. Notice I did not say God's man has to pray. I believe you have to pray. I believe prayer is an intimate part of your life. Learning how to pray and how not to pray is very important. But this man has a specific prayer. My question to you and to this church is, as we learn God's burden and as you understand what God's burden is, then you understand how to more intelligently pray about what God wants to accomplish.

I will just give you the answer real quick. In the Old Testament, he is praying about Jerusalem. He understands that Jerusalem is the city of God. He understands that Jerusalem is the program

of God, and his prayer is almost as good as the first part. Look what he says in verse 5. He sits down in verse 4 and he begins to pray. What a great prayer.

Nehemiah 1:5-8

And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments: Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned. We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses. Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations:

When he prays, his prayer is not for himself. This guy is so in tune with God, he has such a burden for the program and the plan of God that when he prays to God, there is nothing in there for himself. He is praying for the mission of God which has been canceled. The mission of God was that all the world would see God's glory. Because of sin and ungodliness and God's people turning away from God, turning away from the Word of God and doing their own thing, at this time in the book of Nehemiah, the plan and the program of God for planet earth has been shut down as far as in operation sense. God is still behind the scenes. God is still in control. God has got a plan that is going to work this whole thing out. But the bottom line is Nehemiah has a burden because he knows part of that plan is Jerusalem, and Jerusalem is out of the place where they need to be.

Let me just say this to you today. I look at this and I think to myself, how in the world did he get that burden? How in the world did he know how to pray? Did you ever go through and look at Solomon's prayer in 1 Kings chapter 3? It is a great prayer. He is the greatest king that Israel ever had. When he prays, here is a man that is the wisest man the world has ever seen. Here is the man that could go anywhere in the world in the time, and the whole world would reverence him and look at him in awe. Yet when he asked when God says, "What do you want to be king?" He said, "Study that prayer." He did not pray for himself. He prayed for the people God gave him. He understood a burden. He saw it. He understood it. He prayed for wisdom. He did not pray for riches. He did not pray for fame or notoriety. He prayed for wisdom to lead God's people. In fact, he says, "I am a child. I do not know what to do. I do not know how to lead. God, give me the wisdom." Why? "For your people." Why? "Because you have a plan and a program, and I have got to be the very best I can be to run that for you." God made him a great wise man and one of the greatest kings that Israel ever had.

I look at things like that and I think, how did he understand that? How did he get a burden? How did he see? How did Nehemiah understand that? Did you ever see the real burden of God in Christ in His first coming in Matthew? He gives it to you so clearly.

Matthew 23:37-39

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

Christ's burden was for Israel when He came. He stands on that hill and He looks at Jerusalem, and He is so burdened inside because He understands that that nation is the people of God that God has chosen through Abraham, who someday their seed is going to be like the stars of heaven. He sees the world in control of God's people. He sees God's people in desolation. He sees once a mighty nation that was powerful now left destitute, and it burdens Him. How did Nehemiah get Christ's burden 500 years before Christ ever showed up? How does Solomon understand what his prayer should be in 1000 BC, 400 years before Nehemiah?

We go through our lives as Christians and we pray about things that we think we ought to pray for. We talk about having a burden, but let me ask you a question. Is your burden God's burden? I am not talking about where I have a burden for my family or a burden for lost people. I am not talking about that. I am talking about what is your specific prayer? I am not talking about, "I pray my kids will all get saved and they will be healthy, and I am praying for this or that or the preacher or praying for this." I am talking about when you look at the whole world today and you see America in the same mess that Jerusalem was in, in disarray as far as the church is concerned, with no Bible, no teaching, nobody there, nobody getting saved, a bunch of just a froth and just a surface stuff. What is your prayer? What is your prayer for this church? Nehemiah came in, and when they brought that into him, he wept.

IV. Understanding the Problem

That brings us to the next thing. Nehemiah understands the problem with Israel. He understands what the issue is. For he says up here in verse 9:

Nehemiah 1:9

But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there.

He understands the issue. Do you know what the basic issue is? They have gotten away from God's Word. They are doing their own thing. Yet if you would walk into the nation of Israel at that time, you would see all the priests in the right place. You would see them still doing the sacrifices. You would see them going through all the religious movements that they were supposed to. They had the aura of being what God wanted them to be. They had all the pomp and circumstance, but they did not have any power of God in their lives. So like most churches today, my kids years ago when they were little, I do not know who bought this for them, but it was a great toy. It was a little deal. It was a thing where it was like a little dashboard of a car, and it had a steering wheel. It had a horn that had a key and had all kinds of things you could flip the

switches on it. To me, it was a great thing to occupy their time. You just set them on the floor, turn the TV on, and they would ram the gears, turn the keys, honk the horn, turn the wheels.

I remember one day as I was walking through there, and Kelly and Jamie both were going to town. They were just making the noises, you know, and ramming the gears and turning all the switches and everything. I thought to myself, "You know what? That is so much like most churches." There is a lot of movement, a lot of action, but there is nothing hooked up. That is what I see today. I see a lot of action, a lot of movement, a lot of things, but nothing is hooked up. We have burdens about everything except God's burden. We are like the nation of Israel. We are like the nation of Israel that is in total disarray. The gates are off the wall. He says, "God, I know the problem. You told us in Your Word that if we transgressed Your law and forgot Your statutes and did not do what is right with Your judgment, that You would scatter us." And God did. He says, "Lord, but I also know, Lord, You said, if we get back to the book and we get back to those statutes, no matter where we were to the uttermost parts of heaven, You would gather us together."

I am saying that to say this. I believe, and I have said it before and I will say it again, I believe that in the day and age of the Laodicean church that we are part of, I believe that God will build a Philadelphia Bible-believing church and a Laodicean church period. I believe it takes two things:

- It takes nine gates outwardly the church has to have that recognizes where people's needs are, recognizes how people come in.
- But I believe it takes something on the inside. Something more than just, "Well, yeah, I got the right Bible." Something more than, "Yeah, I know what I believe."

I am not talking about, "Do you have God's burden? Do you understand what God is doing?" We are living in a confusing time today. If there is ever a time where, as the book of Proverbs chapter 22 and chapter 23 says that we have lost the landmarks. If there is ever a time that we are in the fields of the fatherless, that is Christians, we do not know where we have come from. We do not know what we believe. We do not know why we exist. All we know is we get up, we go to church, we read our Bibles. We do not know anything about them. We do not know where we, we do not know why we are a member of this church. We just know that I am here. We know no history of where we come from, no history of where we have been, nothing is going on. We just go through the daily routines. Well, in laboratories in Kansas City, Milwaukee, Chicago, LA, New York, there are little lab rats that do the same thing on a daily basis. What is the difference?

The difference is that we as God's people:

- Should have God's burden.
- Have God's prayer.
- Understand that where we are at today in the 21st century, we are standing on the very verge of the second coming of Christ. That needs to be our focus, the horse gate. We talked about it, the east gate. We talked about it. We ought to be doing God's business in a world where it is wrecked and ruined Christianity, where all the gates are all.

I am not going to stand here and tell you we are the only salvation of the world as this church. There are other churches that are doing the work and doing the job, but I am saying, forget them. This church needs to function and operate like we were the only one doing it, even though we are not. I am not such a fool as to think that we are the only ones. But our attitude ought to be, "Boy, that we have got a job to do." It takes everybody. It takes us getting people saved, and it takes the time of spending time helping somebody. That is why I am willing to spend whatever time it takes. That is why I do whatever I could do for anybody that gets saved. You know why? Because we have a mandate. We have a mission. I am not just doing it because, "Oh, well, I am a preacher. That is what preachers do." Preachers do not do that. Preachers administrate. I do it because I know we have got a burden and we have got a plan, and God has something that He wants us to accomplish.

The gates are down. Look at this thing. He says over here in chapter 1, he says, when the guys first come in verse 3, he says, "Also the wall of Jerusalem is broken down. The gates thereof are burned with fire." You come over in chapter 2, verse 3, and what does he say? In all the things that are happening, in both cases, they put the emphasis on, "Look at that. And the gates thereof are consumed with fire." That was the main issue. The main issue is the gates are down. People cannot get into the city to find God. I am telling you what is wrong with the church today. The gates are down. They are just interested in how many get there, how much money do you bring? What can you do for me? When the issue is the church is here for you, the Word of God and your attitude toward it is the key to restoring this church, restoring Christianity, just like it was the attitude and it was the key to restoring the city in Nehemiah's time.

Gates are down. People cannot get into the city. That is our burden. Getting people into the family of God, getting them in through the gates that are Biblical gates and showing them and teaching them and giving them everything for their families, for themselves, for their jobs, for the world that we live in, because it is real confusing out there. You look at the political arena, it is confusing. You look at the medical world, it is confusing. You look at Christianity, it is confusing. Oh, thank God. God gave us a book that straightens all that out.

So we see that God's man has to have a burden. We see that God's man has to have a prayer. We see that God's men have to understand what the real problem is. I just get tickled to death when I hear religious people talk about what the problem is in America. They want to blame it on, first of all, they always want to blame it on the devil. I realize the devil is a wicked person, and I do not give him any due at all other than what God does on the thing, but let me just tell you this. The devil is not the source of your problems or America's problems. Oh, he may have got the idea going, but then he went on his way to someplace else. The real problem in America has got nothing to do with the breakdown of the school system, though that is a terrible thing. Somebody said, "Well, when they took prayer out of schools, man, they really destroyed the thing." Well, I am all for prayer in schools, and I think it was wrong, but let me tell you, taking prayer out of the school did not destroy anything. You know where it got destroyed? It destroyed in the pulpits of our church and when it quit preaching the Word of God. It got to that place when preachers wanted to make you happy so you would not leave instead of preaching what you needed to hear. It got to that place when great crowds came in, and everybody and preachers said, "Wow."

I mean, I used to be in a system where they had Sunday school contests across the country. We would pick a church way out there on the East Coast someplace. We would have a Sunday school campaign, and it was all about how many can we get? How many can we have? We did not care what they were saved or what they struggled with. We just wanted you to be here so we could count you. Once we were done and we won the little trophy, go ahead and go home. That is America. Preachers should not care how many come to church. I mean, you want people to come. But if that becomes your focus and you say, "Well, if I got 150 people here today, I can really preach. If only 20 show up, well, I do not know if I can preach as good." There is something wrong with you. God help the only one that ever shows up on Sunday morning when the rest of you decide not to come because I will wax your tail just like I do everybody else's. We will change some things. There will not be a left side or right side. We will put you right down here, man. You see, you can preach that way when you have a burden, when you understand the problem, when you understand what we need to do. I am telling you, we are in the ministry for the wrong reason. We want notoriety. We want to be on television. We want to be nationally known. We want to get involved in politics. We want to go lead this march and lead that. I am not saying some of those marches are not good things, but I am saying do not let that take the place of God's burden and understanding what the job is of the church today.

V. God's Timetable and the Right People

Another thing we need to look at here, this is an incredible thing too. When you see the outward man, you have got to see the inward. You have got to look at the men that God had here. When you look at this and you study it and you put this together with other things throughout the Word of God, it is incredible. Do you know that God has a timetable for everything? I do not know if you know that or not. Man is going to be on this earth 6,000 years, and the 7,000 years is going to be the millennium. You can find that all the way through the Bible. Dispensation of the fullness of time, that is called. Fullness of time. God has a date.

Genesis 15:16

But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.

He told Abraham, he said, "You are going to have to be down in Egypt, nation of Israel, for 430 years." There was a time. The book of Ecclesiastes says there is a time to be born. Hebrews says there is a time to die. Romans 11 talks about the times of the Gentiles. Luke 21 talks about the fullness of the Gentiles. How could you miss it? When Christ was on this earth in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, He said it how many times when His mother said, "Why are you not doing this?" He would keep saying this, "Mine hour is not yet come." God has a timetable for everything.

In the book of Nehemiah, we see that timetable fulfilled because whether you know it or not, you have the right guy in the right place at the right time. God was ready to do something. You know what my biggest problem is as a Christian? I have two problems, and you too. My two problems are either getting ahead of God or getting behind God. That is my big problem. That is my two

biggest problems. I either get ahead of God or I get behind God. Where we need to be is right with God. That is where Nehemiah was. That is where Nehemiah was.

If you ever look at Matthew 4, when the devil shows up, he tries to get Christ to do four things. All those things are the right thing at the wrong time. That is what the devil wants us to do as the church. He wants us to do the right thing at the wrong time. Getting ahead of God or getting behind God. Yet when I look at this in these chapters down here, I see right on the money God has a timetable. The timing is incredible. God has the right man at the right place at the right time, who has the right burden, who has the right prayer, who has the right people around him to do the job that God wants to get done. I believe by the mark of spiritual maturity, you are simply always keeping the burden of God with the timing of God. It does you no good to have a burden if it is not God's burden. It does you no good to pray if you do not understand God's prayer for the time and age that you live in. It does you no good to have the prayer and the burden if you do not understand God's timing in the thing.

That is hard for us as Americans to grab a hold of, is not it? Because we are so impatient. The devil built a society around us that is just the opposite of that. We live in a fast society. My mom and dad, when I was growing up, they waited. They waited probably, they were married probably for 15 years before they bought their first house. Saved every dime they could. Now today we can go out and buy one just like that. Cars are the same way. When I was in high school, you did not get a car when you were in high school. You know when you got a car? When you got a job and could buy your own. Not today. Kids demand a car. He thinks he earns it. I am not saying you should not have one. I am saying that is a society we live in.

We used to go and have family meals together around the house. Every once in a while we would go out to eat. Then somebody would come up with the idea where we could have a fast food place where you did not have to sit down and rest. You could hurry up and eat and hurry up and go. McDonald's was the first one. I ate at the first McDonald's in Canton, Ohio. Still there today. Hamburgers for 15 cents. French fries were a nickel. Not a piece, for a bag of them. It was revolutionized as a fast food place. Giving you an alternative to just the slow, "Mom does not have to cook. Mom does not have to spend hours." Now you can go get fast food. That was the real thing in our society. Pretty soon it was not fast enough. Then you had to have a drive-through, a faster place to eat at the fast food place because going in was not fast enough anymore.

We look at that and we just accepted the society, but that all is suddenly built around the fact to get you and me as God's people not to want to wait on God. You know the greatest virtue you can have with a child of God? It is patience. Waiting on God. It is the hardest thing to do. In everything in our society, it is built around that. It used to be that you would send a letter to somebody. You had to wait three or four days to get an answer. Now you get on the internet and you just talk to them or call them up on the phone around the world.

When I was a kid going to school, you know, you never liked to wear brand new shoes. The teacher would get up there and she would see Billy with new shoes on, you know, and everybody would stand up and say, "See my new shoes." Remember that? I used to hate that. I never would

wear new shoes. It would embarrass you to death. No kid wanted to. So you would scuff them, you know, and you would tear them up. You did not want anybody to say, "Oh, you got new shoes." "No, they are not new. No, I painted them this morning. They are not new." You hate that because it puts you out because there is something about being at war and look that you are in. It always bothered me. The kids did not want to have a fresh, clean, spotless look. They always wanted to get a worn look. Why is that? You know, when you got saved, you got a spotless, clean look. You know what the devil wants to do? He wants to give you back that old worn look.

I do not know how many times as a kid, 14, 15 years old, I used to wash my jeans to get them to fade. You did not want to wear new shoes. You did not want to wear new jeans. They just did not feel right. They looked too blue. Too new. It is just like, "Yeah, I just, yeah, you walk in and say, 'Okay, I just got new jeans and new shoes. Here I am.'" You liked them after you had them about six months and you wore them, you got them dirty, and they began to fade, and they began to look a little worn. Then you are in. Nobody said, "Oh, you got worn." No, worn is the exception. So somebody in the marketing figured that out. But now you pay \$50 a pair for old worn out jeans. I even saw something that day. They had the knees cut out of them when you bought that way. What is wrong with us? We are a society that not only can we not wait on God, we cannot wait for our jeans to wear out so that we are in.

In America, a fast food restaurant like McDonald's employs more employees than US Steel does. What does that tell you? It tells you that we are in a hurry. I know that Christians, even though it is hard as we try, we are not in this world. We are of this world. I like my daughters years ago, and I tell this story. Kelly, I know she remembers this story because she wanted to be a cheerleader. Remember this story, honey? It is a great story, was not it? Do you like to stand up and tell it? Okay, I will tell it. She wanted to be a cheerleader. You know, me as dad, I do not want her to be a cheerleader. I do not want her to get that crowd. I mean, I am not saying that some people could not do it and be a good testimony, but that is not what I wanted for her. I am trying to be philosophical, you know, and I was never a dad who just said no. I always took the Bible, tried to explain to some form, maybe not very successful, why they said it.

I will never forget. I told her the story of how that, I told her the story of how if somebody worked in a flour mill and they went in there and they were very honest, very open, was never going to steal flour. But just because they were around the flour mill, when they came home, they had flour all over them. I said, "You know what? That is the way the world is. If you go to work in a flour mill, as hard as you try to stay clean, you are going to come home with flour all over you. If you go into a situation in the world like that, as hard as you try, you are going to come home with the world all over you." I am telling you, it is one of those things that it creeps into our lives as Christians, even though we do not want it to, even though we try to protect our children from it. Even though we try to go through all those things that we live in a society that wants everything right now, and it is so fast and it is so moving, and everything has to be the way we want it right now, and in our Christian lives, it comes the same way, and that old flour gets on us because we are not of this world, but we are in this world.

We go through all these things, and we carry this thing if we come home with it, and pretty soon we forget that the fact, what God's burden is, we forget what God's prayer is, and we are in this

thing caught up, and we are going to church, but we do not know why, we do not have any purpose, we do not have any plan, we do not have any reason for being here this morning. We just, because if I did not, Bob was going to call me and find out where I was, or, you know, I am supposed to go. Why are you supposed to go? I do not know, because we have just always done it. We have always done it. There has to be more to it than that, but that is what creeps into our society, and we lose the plan, we lose the vision, we lose the burden, and Christianity just becomes going through the motions, and we do not want to wait on God, and we get way ahead of God, or way behind God, when God wants us to be right where we are at.

I want you to look at God's timing here, this is incredible, right man, right place, right time. God has a burden, that burden was for the nation of Israel to become the great nation that it was again, it is in disarray, but God looks down and He finds a group of people that have His burden. They have His burden because no matter what everybody else was doing, they were staying true to God and His Word. The fact that Israel departed from the statutes, forsook the judgments, did not do what is right with the law, Nehemiah did. Because he did, he is there now and he understands in the midst of turmoil, God's burden, God's prayer, and God's plan.

Nehemiah 2:1-5

And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that wine was before him: and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king. Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence. Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid, And said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire? Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it.

When you look at this, I cannot read chapter 2, verse 1 without reading chapter 1, verse 11 because it is really the key. Just the last sentence.

Nehemiah 1:11

O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer.

Right man, right place, right time. He had God's burden, he had God's prayer, and God orchestrated the circumstances that here Nehemiah is in the presence of the one man that can turn things around, and God just happened to make him his cupbearer. How did that happen? He is the king's cupbearer, and he comes in, and the Bible says in his first four verses that he is sorrowful. He just got a report. The king looks down and says, "What is the matter? Are you sick?" "No." "Well, then it must be something heavy on your heart. Tell me. Tell me what you need." He is afraid now because he is on the spot. But I love this. He throws up what we call in Christianity, one of these Nehemiah prayers. He says down there. He says, verse 2 says, "Then I

was very sore afraid and said unto the king." In other words, he is praying while he is talking. Have you ever been in that situation? It usually happens when a state highway patrolman comes up and asks for your driver's license. It usually happens when something bad goes on in your life and you are praying, you are talking to somebody, and it is just going to pot around you. At the same time you are talking to them, you are saying, "Oh, God, help me and get me out of this mess." That is called a Nehemiah prayer. He is afraid. Here he is. The king has now said, "What do you need?" He is afraid to tell him. So he is throwing up a prayer to God saying, "Oh, God, give me the words to say."

You know what he does in verse 5?

Nehemiah 2:5-8

And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it. And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,) For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time. Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah; And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me.

Now I just got to make comment on that. That is one of the strangest things in all the Bible. You know that? Why does it have to be the queen? I will tell you why. Do you know who that queen is? Do you know your Bible? Do you know the books of the Bible and how this thing lays out? That is Esther. Remember Esther? The Jewish queen that got on the throne and the Gentile queen got knocked off the throne. There is a Jewish queen sitting on that throne next to that king who God has got the right woman in the right place at the right time to get the right ear of the right king for the right man at the right place at the right time to get the right job done for God with the right burden, the right prayer. That is why. You think God just threw that in there for, "Oh, we have got some extra space. Put it that the queen was there with him." No, no, no, no, no. That queen is somebody for a reason there. I am telling you, when you lay it out and you put it out, it can only be one queen who that is. It is Queen Esther.

God has got a plan. God has got a burden, and God has got not only the right man, God has got the right woman. He has got everything in the, and He has got the right men with Nehemiah and Nehemiah. He explains it. He says, "I am giving you my burden. I need you to, I need to go rebuild." The king said with a queen sitting by him, "For how long shall the journey be? And when will our return?" So it pleased the king to send me, and I set him a time. Moreover, I said unto the king, "If it please the king." Now he is getting bold. "Let letters be given to me to the governor beyond the river that they may convey me over till I come into Judah and a letter on the Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates and for the palace, which I pertain to the house and for the wall of the city. And for the house that I shall enter into." And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me.

God had a plan. Every New Testament principle for building the church is in this chapter inwardly. You want to get the gates. There is outwardly how to build it. But you cannot build it outwardly without understanding what was going on behind the scenes inwardly. It was not just, "Oh, we are going to go down to rebuild the gates and put the gates back on and build the wall." No, God's plan was there for 70 years. Finally God raised up a man and some men and put the woman in the right place. Put the man in the right place. Put the right timing and everything in the right place. He had the right burden. He had the right prayer. He had everything that he needed. God said, "Now is the time." Not only does the king send him, the king pays for it. You know why? Great principle. God always pays for what He orders.

This idea of somebody going out and doing something and then got to cry over the world for somebody to raise the money to make it happen to pay for, I promise you God is not in it. Let me tell you something. A principle I live by and I will die by, and I believe every day of my life. That is why I tell visitors when they come here, "You do not have to give a dime. I just want you here. I want you to enjoy it. I want you to feel the freedom. I do not want you to think they are after your money. I do not want you to think, anyway, I do not want you to think, I want you to be the most special person here. I want you to leave here thinking, "They made me feel like the person that I am, they really love me, they are really warm. They do not want nothing from me." I want you to do that because the bottom line, if I believe it is God's church and it is God's people that are here, then God will always pay for what He orders. We are not going to have a bond campaign. We are not going to drive this, we are not going to send you out with little tin cans on the thing there, giving you dimes and nickels. Let me tell you something. If this is God's church and He ordered it, then He will pay for it. If He does not, then it is not His and it will flop. If this thing is not of God and alive with God's power, we are not going to resuscitate and put it in a life support system.

I believe that it is. I believe in this great chapter here, not only does the King send Him back, right place, right time, right man, right woman, not only does the King send Him, the King pays for it. Verse 8 says, "And the king granted me, according not to the king, not because of Nehemiah, not because of anybody other than the good hand of my God which was upon me." Let me tell you something. When the hand of God is upon you, there is nobody going to stop you. There is nothing going to slow you up. But you know what it takes to have that?

- It takes God's man having the right burden.
- It takes God's man and God's woman having the right prayer.
- It takes God's man and God's woman being in the right place, the right time, with the right circumstances, and understanding what the problem is and realizing that God is the author of time.

God's timing in your life and my life is everything. God's timing of building this church and putting the people together and doing what He did, I mean it is everything. Because we have got a group of people here that I firmly with all my heart understand the burden, understand the prayer, understand what needs to be done and what the problem is. Even if you do not fully grasp it, you are willing to learn it. That is all that God can ask. I just believe like back in Nehemiah's time the King said, "Go ahead and build what God wants you to do and I will take care of it." I

believe God looked down from heaven and He says to us, "Go ahead and build a work. My good hand is upon you and I will give you everything you need to get it done." Boy, so far, so good.

I believe with all of my heart that God brings the right people to the right place, the right time that needs to be done. I believe you are not here by any accident. I believe through the process of this, I have learned some things over the years. I have learned that you are not here for nothing for God and you do something, you know, everybody gets on the bandwagon. Everybody is excited. It only takes about a month, a month and a half. Then you start to see who really is and who is not. I have learned this, the ones that you think are going to really do it are never the ones that really do it. Out of nowhere, God brings the people that you would never suspect to get the job done to get done.

I will never forget my first time I came to Kansas, and I was like, "Oh, I am going to get it done." They sent two guys from a college class where I was going to work out to pick me up at the airport. I do not even remember their name, but I will never forget it. They picked me up, you know, and they were telling me all what their jobs were and what they did and how glad they were to have me here. I thought, and I was pretty dumb and naive then. I thought, "Wow, if everybody is just like these two guys, man, it is going to be a piece of cake. These guys are really gone. These guys are the ones." From that day when I saw, I never saw these two guys ever again. God taught me a great lesson. He taught me the people you think are going to do it are not really going to do it. It is going to be the ones you never think are going to do it, are going to do it.

I will tell you what, through the years God built the men and the women here that are pastors in this church with me and run this ministry and know this ministry. But I am telling, when it comes, I learned something else too. There is not any one person who will build a church. You are not going to find someone out there with a church. You are going to say, "Oh, our problems are over now. We are just going to pay for everything." Or you are not going to find somebody over here showing, "He is a great soul winner. This guy is going to fill our church up with people. Oh, our problems are over." No, never happens that way. You know what happens? It happens the way God wants it to happen in God's time with God's people. We all get our nose right down in the dirt, and we win them one at a time. We love them. We take care of them. We spend the time with them. That is why I am willing to spend time with any man or any woman in this building that wants to learn the Word of God. I will help you however at your own pace. I will give you whatever you need to get the job out because I believe that God has a plan for you. Whether it involves this church right now or down the line, whatever the case may be, that is not my care. My care is you are saved. You are on your way to heaven, and you want to learn something about God. I want to help you get there.

Right man. Right place. Right timing. What a great story when you see the gates that are on that wall and all those people going in and rebuilding and all the work that is being done and all the excitement and all the happenings on the outside as people are singing and building those walls and talking about how great it is to be back where God wanted me. But do you stop and look at the inside of what really got you there? Because whatever outward movement you have that takes you this way, there is an inward movement that directed you. Whether it is good or whether

it is bad. No movement on the outside will ever happen without something happening on the inside. It is true of your life. It is true of this church. It is true of Jerusalem. True of everything in this world. There will have to be an inside force that always facilitates the outside direction. In this case, it was the right man, the right place for the right men, the right women, and everything in the right spot, and God's timing said, "Okay, let us build," and they built. That is where we are at. That is why everybody is important. No matter where this church goes, whatever it does, everybody will always be important. But I recognize the fact that there is not one person in any church where all hangs. It all hangs together with everybody. A chain will only be as strong as its weakest link. A wall will be only as strong as the weakest brick, and a church will only be as strong as the weakest individual in it. That is why we are to be there for each other to encourage each other, edify each other. That is why everything we do has to have a bottom line to prepare you for whatever God wants you to do. Right man, right place, right time. Father.