

I. The Foundation of a Biblical Church

When we put our church together, we took some time and talked about some different aspects. Then I talked to you about building a church. I took you to the best place I know in the Bible that really shows you how to build a church that is balanced, a church that is functional, a church that is everything that God wants it to be. Churches today have a tough time growing. I told you earlier, most churches are made up of old people. Most young couples do not want to go to church; they do not want to get involved. They do not find it an exciting place to be. The reason for that is because nothing exciting is being said. It is all relative, and yet at the same time, there are some exciting things in the Word of God.

When I looked at building a church, this is where I went because I knew that you could go to all the seminaries in the world. You could read a thousand books on how to build a church, and at the end of the day, you still have to come back here because the One who wrote this book knows how to build His church. I guess that is the difference between this ministry and many ministries today. I am not interested in what is popular out there. These guys around the country, they have seminars, and thousands and thousands of preachers come at great expense to sit down and listen to somebody that has a church of 25,000 people, learning how you can build a church of 25,000.

Let me tell you something. An old warhorse of a preacher told me something many, many years ago, and I never forgot it. He said, "Just because you have a crowd does not mean you have a church." I think we have lost sight that we think success in the ministry is bigness. No, success in the ministry is doing what God wants you to do, no matter how big it ever gets. That is the key, and that is the philosophy by which we started.

In that series, and we have been keying on this really as a theme or a sub-theme through the month, we have been talking about how God wants to train you up so that you will become the right man or the right woman in the right place at the right time. That is the whole concept of this. The whole concept is about God preparing you so that He can drop you in any circumstance, in any situation, that you can adjust to whatever situation He puts you in and be used of Him. Most of God's people never get to that place in their life. Some of them think they do. It never ceases to amaze me some of the stupid stuff that I hear come out of God's people's mouths. It is simply because they, as old Clint Eastwood used to say, are "a legend in their own minds."

The bottom line is this: if it is not in the Book and it is not a biblical approach, do not mess with it when it comes to your life, raising your kids, whatever. I have found that most people who do not know the Bible or have never taken the time to study the Bible, they are like everybody's old grandma. Every grandmother in the world has her own recipe for curing the common cold. For some people, it is chicken noodle soup. For some people, it is this. For some people, it is that. My favorite one was two shots of Jack Daniels in a cup of coffee and drink it down fast. That was my remedy; it did not work, but it got you so drunk you did not bother whether you were sick or not.

Everybody has their ideas how to fix things, and sometimes we fall victim to that. Sometimes you are going to find people who do not know the Bible, but what they want to do is they want to impose on you their homespun theology, so to speak, of how to fix your marriage or how to raise your kids or how to do this or how to do that. You have to understand it for yourself. When you get out there and you start to work with people, whether it is under this ministry here or maybe at work, I want to make sure that you are not giving them what you think, but you are giving them what the Bible says. I want them to be able to look at your family and see your children the way that it should be. I want them to be able to see in your life that the principles do work. That is so important. It is so key for you to understand that God wants to do everything in your life because He wants you to be the right man or the right woman in the right place at the right time.

II. Training for God's Deployment

I think of the rapid deployment movement in the United States military, basically down at Fort Bragg with the 82nd Airborne Division. The 82nd Airborne Division is the oldest Airborne Division in the United States. It was the All-American Division back in World War I before they had parachutes, but it developed into what we have known today as the 82nd Airborne. The 82nd Airborne has three battalions. A battalion has about 400 or 500 guys in it, depending on the strength level. They have three or four battalions which are designated as rapid deployment battalions. In other words, their claim to fame is they can be dropped anywhere in the world in 24 hours, in any circumstance, in any situation. When there is a problem, they can choose the men that they need from a small unit or to a battalion size, and they can airbore and airlift them in, however they have to. If they can get them in on trucks, they will get them in on trucks. If they can march them in, they will march them in. Or if they have to bail out of airplanes and drop down, whatever they do. They are designed; they are trained for one purpose. They are different from anybody else for one purpose: they are ready at any moment's notice, as if the president calls, to be dropped into any circumstance, any situation on planet Earth, and to resolve that situation by whatever strength or whatever force it takes.

I have always marveled at men like that. I have always marveled at that kind of mentality. Yet at the same time, I have thought to myself, that is exactly the way I want to train Christians. I would like to have a church in time. I would like to have a church of men and women, all age groups. You see, because you might be Pat's age, and Pat, you are not going to join the 82nd Airborne this afternoon, are you? I am not either, Pat. Some of us older guys around here, we are not going to do that. But in God's war, it does not matter how old you are. It does not matter that you cannot jump out of a plane. It does not matter if you cannot force march 20 miles, 40 miles, 30 miles. All that matters is that you can be used. A guy like Pat's age, guys like some of you middle-aged guys in here, some of you that are older than middle-aged, you bring with you experience. In other words, everybody brings something to the party.

The younger ones have the strength. Somebody said one time that being a young person is "heat without light." Being an old person is "light without heat." That is so true. But in any church, it is a good mix. An older guy, he does not have the heat, but he has got the light; he has been around.

There are some things that he knows, things that he understands. You take the best of that and blend it together, and that is what you have.

I look at training young men and young ladies, training moms and dads, training older couples, that wherever you are at in life, I say it all the time, I do not care where you are at. I do not care how old you are. I do not care what you have come out of. I do not care what you know or do not know about the Bible. Everybody in this room can be used in that kind of format, that God can get you ready to be the right man at the right time, at the right place. God can take this church or God can take any individual here and feel comfortable enough that He can drop you in any situation, anywhere, anytime, without consoling you. He can take you at work. He can take you in your family. He can take you around the city. He can take you around the country. He could take you around the world and drop you in wherever He wants to put you, and you would function just like the 82nd Airborne does down at Fort Bragg. That is my goal. To me, that is a church. To me, that is what Christianity is all about. We do not take rifles and guns and M16s, but our weapons of warfare are spiritual and not carnal. In a lot of ways, that is a lot tougher war than fighting war with guns and against enemies. But the bottom line is, that is our goal in building a church. We talked about the concept of the right man in the right place at the right time.

III. Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther: The Blueprint for Building

I think Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther are three great books. They are three of my favorite books in the Bible. I like the order of the books. First, you have Ezra, and Ezra shows you when they went back, they built the temple. Then you have Nehemiah. Nehemiah, when he goes back sometime later, they rebuild the walls in the city. I have shown you how Ezra is a picture of when they build the temple, your body is a picture of that temple. What these three books show you is that you have to be something for God before you can do something for God. This is why I was in no hurry to install deacons. Most churches, they get a church together and they have to get it all together the first week. Of course, that is ridiculous. You have to prove all things. You have to find out who can do what, and that takes some time. You have to allow the leadership to rise up to the top. You have to rely on those people that are coming up to take over the reins of leadership.

Of course, that is what you find. You find that in Ezra, they build the temple; you have to build your body first. In Nehemiah, then they build the walls of the city; they build the church. We started to lay out, if you remember last time, that in this city called Jerusalem, which was God's plan for the Old Testament, there is a wall around that city, and those walls have nine gates. We have talked about those nine gates as the areas of ministry. When I looked at building a church four years ago, in my mind, in my concept, in my architectural scheme of things, as I looked at a church, I thought of a city. I thought of a wall around that city, which in the Bible, the wall represents protection. I looked at it from a standpoint that the protection of this church will always be the Bible doctrine that we teach. The teachings of the Bible in this church will always be the safety net and the wall that protects this church. But within those walls, you have to get in and get out of the city. I told you that those nine gates, and we looked at some of them last time,

represent the ministries that this church has to have. In some cases, it is the attitude about ministry that we have to have. But if you want to have a well-balanced, well-functioning church that really gets to the place where it really does what God wants it to do and reaches its potential, reaches people, accomplishes the goals, and really fulfills the New Testament requirements, you have to have nine gates in this church.

IV. The Significance of the Number Nine: Fruitfulness

I have to tell you this, this is just a little side element. When you count them up all the way through the Bible, there are 12 gates total. That is an interesting study in itself. On these 12 gates and these walls, there are also seven towers. That is another great study, and they are all listed in the Bible. The 12-gate thing is a kind of, it looks like that is what it is, a little shroud of mystery around that. But in this particular passage, he talks about nine. Somebody asked me one time, "Why was there not seven?" If seven is the number of completion and God's church was going to be a perfect church, why were there not seven gates? The answer to that is simply this: we know that there are certain numbers in the Bible that always mean certain things. In the Bible, the number nine always deals with fruit bearing.

If you want to have a fruitful church, and the Bible says that we are to be a fruitful church, if you want to have a church that has the fruit of the Spirit in it, and we are to be a church that has the fruit of the Spirit, then you have to get these nine gates. The first time you find nine in your Bible is in Genesis chapter nine with Noah. Noah is told to be fruitful and multiply the earth.

And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth.

That is the definitive passage on the number nine in your Bible. First time it shows up, Genesis chapter nine. In Genesis chapter 17, Abraham was promised the promised seed, Isaac. That promised seed, Isaac, was the seed that was going to bring through the Lord Jesus Christ. You know the story of Abraham, how he has a tough time, him and Sarah, getting it all together and believing what God said. But you know why God waited so long? Because this was the promised seed. The promised seed was going to bring the salvation, the bearing of fruit to the whole world. So God stayed consistent with His Bible, and He waited. Abraham was 99. See how that thing works? That is how it works.

You are to be a fruitful Christian, and you are to be a fruitful Christian because of the Holy Spirit of God being fruitful in your life. In Galatians chapter five, you will find, yes, you might have guessed it, nine fruit of the Holy Spirit of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

It does not stop there. It is found in Galatians. Count them up. Galatians is the ninth book in the New Testament. Do not stop there. Look at the word "Galatians." Nine letters in the word "Galatians." In other words, if you want fruit, you stick with the number nine. If you want to build a church, and by the way, those nine fruit of the Spirit are found in verse 22 and verse 23.

Add them up, it is nine. If you want to have a fruitful church, then you get into the book of Nehemiah, and you find those nine gates, get them to find out for you, and then go from there, and you will have a productive, fruitful church that will do everything God wants you to do. It is just that simple.

Oh yeah, I almost forgot. "Holy Bible," nine letters. Fruit of a book. Amen. Too generic. "King James," nine letters. So somebody says, "1611," six and three is what? That is why I use this book. There is no doubt in it the way it works. God's formula is perfect. It is man's formula that has the problems. I will tell you, the older I get, the more I am just unimpressed with what goes on in the world of Christianity or what goes on in the world itself. I know that the answers to it all are in this old black-backed 66, what is the fruit-bearing book of God. It is that simple.

V. The State of the Church: A Modern Jerusalem in Disarray

So there are nine gates, and we saw Nehemiah under the decree of Artaxerxes. We saw him go back, and he looked at Jerusalem, and Jerusalem was burned. The walls were knocked down. It was in disarray. It was a terrible thing. The city of God, the place where God had put His name in the Old Testament, the place that just 600 years before or so, the whole world was coming to and seeing God's glory. What a place. What a shambles it is. The walls are destroyed. The gates are off the hinges. The city has been burned. As old Nehemiah rode through there, his heart was so burdened and despaired, but God had taken Nehemiah. God had now got the right man in the right place for the right job.

I told you how old Nehemiah, going back through there and looking at that city of Jerusalem, put that on the flip side of the New Testament, that wreckage of Jerusalem. It is a picture of the church today. The church is destroyed. It is in disarray, burned up, absolute shambles. They do not have a clue of what is going on. As we speak, around this country on a weekly basis, they are holding whole conferences trying to ask themselves within their own little group, "What is wrong? Why are we not growing? Why are we dying on the vine? Why are we not sustaining ourselves? Why is our attendance down? Why does nobody care? Why does nobody come? Why is nobody involved? Why can't we get anybody to give? Why can't we do this? Why can't we do that?" The answer is simple: you are in a house of disarray that has been broken down and busted, and you are the ones that let it happen.

Do you think God wants His church in disarray? No. He does not want His church in disarray any more than He wanted His city in disarray. But it was those Jews in the Old Testament who forsook this Book and thought they knew more about it than God did. You can take that on the flip side, and that is what is wrong with our churches today. We have got a bunch of men who think they are smarter than God, who have nothing to do with God's Word, and their way just is not working. Yet they are too prideful, they are too blind to see it. As I look down through here, I see that this city that Nehemiah goes back to represents where we are at.

There is another great concept I want to tell you. During this particular time, there were probably at least three and a half million to four million Jews on planet Earth. They were all centered

around the captivity in Babylon, and then as Babylon goes away, it is taken over by Persia, where we are at now in the time of Artaxerxes. Think about it. Four million Jews. Four million Jews who have been given the promises of God. Four million Jews who still fall under the covenant that was given to Abraham. Four million Jews who understand exactly all of their history, who understand about Solomon, who understand about the rebuilding and the importance of the temple. Yet in the midst of all of that, four million Jews, when the opportunity presents itself to go back and build the city of God and put it back on its hinges and put it back on its function, only 42,360 out of four million go back. The rest of them were just comfortable living, staying in Babylon. That is where the church is today. Babylon represents the world. Babylon represents the devil's system.

Here we have a whole scenario built around this great concept that out of four million Jews... How many Christians do you think there are in America today? Professing Christians? A lot more than four million. Yet look at how many are really serious about serving God. It is absolutely pathetic. I know that everything rises and falls on leadership, and I know the pastors have failed, and I know that it breaks down that way, but come on. For most of God's people, the Holy Spirit of God, who desires God's glory and desires to bring credit and glory and honor to Christ, He has just got to be homesick and doing flip-flops inside of us because of all the ungodly stuff that we are involved in in Babylon. It is incredible what goes on today in the name of Jesus Christ. 42,360 out of four million.

VI. The Context of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther

We looked at these gates, and we talked about very briefly the Sheep Gate, the place of sacrifice; the Fish Gate, soul winning; the Old Gate, your history and entering into the fields of the fathers, which has sparked a lot of good talk on Thursday night; the Valley Gate, your compassion on the fallen; the Dung Gate, we talked about every church being self-sufficient in the right way, self-sustaining in the right way, and self-cleaning in the right way. Today I want to talk about the last three gates.

Before we do, I want to give you a better little context about these three books. I want you to see something that God showed me about 15 years ago that literally changed my perception of the ministry and churches and the times that I am living in. We are living in very defining times. By that, I mean that whenever you were alive in history, God through His Word would define for you where you were at in relationship to His coming. I believe that. I see it in men's writings of three or four hundred years ago. I see it in some of the writings of the church fathers a thousand years ago. I believe that God for every Christian who gets himself into the Word of God and learns and grows through the process, I believe that God will define for you not only your job, not only your function, not only your mission, but I believe He will define for you where you are at in proximity to the coming of the Lord so you can better do the job that God wants you to do. I believe that. I know it is true because God did it for me, and I am certainly nothing special.

I want you to see these three books in context. In order in your Bible, it is Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. The reason why it is in that order in your Bible is because if you take Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, and then Job and Psalms, you have a complete pre-millennial approach to the Second

Coming of Christ from all down through history. So that is the reason why that is in there. But as far as history is concerned, that order is not correct. As far as God putting them in the Bible, He put them in the way that He wanted to show you. But in reality, in time, you have Ezra, then you have Nehemiah, and Esther is the book that is in between that overlaps a little bit on both ends. That is an amazing concept.

The book of Esther is the only book in the Bible where there is no mention of God. It is the only book in the Bible where you could not find God with a laser beam and a flashlight. There is no reference to God. There is no mention of God. There is nobody praying to God. There is nobody talking about God. It is seemingly a godless book. It has led scholars to even question whether Esther should be in your Bible at all. I guess when we get to heaven, we will look at those scholars and question if they should even be in heaven at all. Esther should be in your Bible.

God taught me a great lesson on Esther a number of years ago. A number of years ago, I led a team going into Romania after the fall of communism. I had with me about 25 or 30 people. Our job was to go in and to take churches that we had already made contact with and to work with them and to take their young men and to try to help them get grounded in the Word of God. We took in the discipleship program like we teach you. We took that in and we spent two weeks there, trying to get all of the churches. We had a contingency that probably represented two or three hundred churches, and we tried to get together for two weeks to try to do that.

Without a doubt, the Romania trip was the hardest trip of all the trips that I have ever taken. There was almost opposition at every turn. It was a situation where we were going through multiple borders, and they did not like Americans. The borders sometimes took you five, six, seven hours to get through. The lines were long. I remember after flying all the way from the United States and how horrendous that was getting all through there, we landed at six o'clock in the morning, and we got on a bus. The bus had to take us to where we were going into Romania, and it was supposed to be like a six-hour trip. We left those buses at seven o'clock that morning and did not get to where we were supposed to be until something like four o'clock the next afternoon. The next afternoon. We were on a bus with nothing to eat, no water, no bathrooms, no nothing for that period of time simply because of the traffic jams at the borders and the problems of getting in. That was the most unbelievable, the hardest trip, physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually, that I have ever been on.

I will never forget at the end of that trip, which we almost did not get out of Romania, I would seriously consider applying for citizenship. We had as tough a time getting out as we had getting in. We had plane schedules we had to make. When I got to the airport, they had messed up so that I had to leave two guys all by themselves in Romania while we went back to the States. It was not a good deal. That was a very hard time for me. I wanted to stay myself, but I could not because I was responsible for everybody. It was one of the hardest decisions I ever made. Luckily, I had two guys who stood up and said, "Hey," because they had been trained, they said, "We will take it, we will handle it, do not worry about it. You get your side back, we will stay here, we will cover each other, we will be all right." They got back in time, and it was good to go.

It was a very tough time. I remember flying back on that plane, so distraught and so wondering to myself what in the world God was doing. I remember I was studying at that time the book of Esther. As I was coming back through the book of Esther, God reminded me that this was the book in the Bible where God was not mentioned, that seemingly, God was not anywhere to be found. I certainly thought in parallel to my own situation, because by this time, I was really asking myself, "What in the world was I doing in Romania? Why did I risk my life and the lives of all these people in a situation where seemingly, God did not want us to be there?" I really was struggling with that all the way back.

It was halfway through that flight that God showed me the greatest key about Esther. Even though Esther does not talk about God in name or God in person, or there is no reference to Him, once you begin to study the book of Esther, what you see is God behind the scenes in Esther, orchestrating every event, curtailng every detail, crossing every T and dotting every I. In Nehemiah, where it says when Nehemiah goes before the king, and the king asks him what his problem is, and he says, "My heart is broken for Jerusalem, the sepulchers of my fathers," the Bible makes one little phrase in there about the king, and it says this: "the queen sitting by him."

You know what God had done in the book of Esther? God in the book of Esther was working behind the scenes. Without anybody seeing and anybody knowing it, He had taken off Vashti and put on Esther on the throne so that it was time for the Jews to go back. Behind the scenes, in a book where God is not mentioned, God had everything ready to go. They just did not see it. God had dethroned Vashti and put on Esther. Now Esther, the Jewish queen, has got the king's ear. I promise you, the reason why Artaxerxes let them go back is because Queen Esther said, "You know what, you need to let them go back." She was the key behind the scenes that 99% of the people who read the Bible never see what God is doing behind the scenes.

I learned from that great trip and that great book of the Bible that it did not matter what the opposition was. It really did not matter how I felt about it. God had called me to do a work, and behind the scenes, even when it looks like He is not there, the promises are that He is there. Personally for me, that was a great victory in my life. God expanded it then a little bit doctrinally. I began to see that the dethroning of Vashti, a Gentile queen, and the setting up of Esther as a Jewish queen, on a doctrinal scale, shows you what God did in the history of the world from 1917 and 1948. God brought an end to the times of the Gentiles. Vashti is the Gentile queen. She is off, and He establishes a Jewish queen back on the throne, the beginning of the end of the times of the Gentiles, and God focusing His attention on the nation of Israel, right in the times that we are living in right now.

In that context, you know why God is not mentioned? In a doctrinal context, because that context would make that doctrinally the Laodicean church period. Today, God is not mentioned in our churches. Verbally, but do not just think because somebody talks about God, they are talking about the God of the Bible, any more than a big crowd makes a church. Do not get caught in that trap. It is an easy trap to get caught into. We turn on the television, we see Joel Osteen or whatever his name is. We look across that thing, and there is a guy with a plastic face, with plastic hair, with a plastic suit. They would probably take him in and unbolt that suit off of him and lift his head off, and he is probably the ugliest guy you ever saw in your life. He stands up

there with his plastic smile, and the people out there just sway back and forth, and they just hear everything he says. He has got a big picture of the world in the back, and everybody says, "Wow, what a ministry!" Really?

Let me tell you something. Because you have a crowd, it does not make it a church. Because you look plastic and you say the right things, it does not make it the message of God. You have to come to the point where you get back to the Bible. Then it does not matter if you have 50,000 or if you have two. I knew an evangelist that has a church right over across the river in Kansas. He is not an evangelist anymore, but when he was an evangelist, his mindset was this: his ministry is so vital to God that he could not take a preaching engagement of less than 10,000 people because he did not want to waste his valuable time doing God's work on a lower number than 10,000. This is the same guy that if you went into, he went into your church to preach, and you put him up with the Holiday Inn, he would check out and go over to the fanciest hotel in the world, in the city, and leave you stuck with both bills. Because not only was his time so valuable, but I guess his rear end was so valuable, he wanted it to sleep well at night. He had done that more than once. He was held up as one of the greatest evangelists the world has ever seen. You know why? Because he gave churches what they wanted, and it was not the Bible. It was crowds. People came to hear him.

I remember one time he told me, he said, "You know what? We had Akron, Ohio. I preached at Akron Baptist Temple last week. We had 900 people saved." The church he was preaching in, I could see the preacher's eyes lighting up. He thought, "Oh, 900 people saved! We are going to go from a church of 2,000 to 20,000 by the end of the week." You know where that translates, do you not? Money is people. People is money. That is where a preacher, you know how you get your cell phones? You can get all those different rings. You get online, I do not know how you do it. Mine just rings. I hear some of you, some of it sounds like a 100-piece marching band coming down the road. But they have one of her preachers now. When it rings, it does not ring. It goes, "Ka-ching, ka-ching, ka-ching, ka-ching, ka-ching." Preachers want that.

900 people saved. So you know what I did? I called Akron Baptist Temple. I mean, prove all things, amen. I said, "Hey, I heard you had a great revival with Brother so-and-so last week." "Oh, we did. We did. We had," she said it, "900 people saved last week." I said, "That is great. What was two weeks ago?" She said, "Yeah, two weeks ago." I said, "That is great. So let me ask you a question. How many of you baptized the last two weeks?" "None." Now, maybe in your mind, there is not something fundamentally wrong when 900 people get saved and nobody gets baptized. But I read a New Testament that everybody got saved and baptized. I do not ever read in here where when somebody got saved and asked, they just said, "Why did you pray about it? Why do I not want to make that commitment?" I am going to tell you something. You get 900 people saved, and you do not get 900 people baptized in the day and age that we are living in, late in the same church, I question their salvation. Do not tell me you love God enough to get saved for Him, but then 20 minutes later, you did not love Him enough to follow through the rest of it. Not that baptism saves you, but it is obedience.

When I saw this, I saw that Esther was a picture of the time age that you and I are in. We are living in a place called the Laodicean Church, which as we look at this time period, we are in a

time where seemingly God is nowhere, but He is everywhere. Yet, if God is everywhere, why is nothing getting done? Why are there not more missionaries to the world? Why are not more people getting saved? Why are preachers always preaching about money? Why are they more worried about building their big edifices and the big buildings than they are building people's lives? Do you think if you were in Joel Osteen's church, I do not mean to pick on him, I just do not know anybody else because I do not pay attention to these things. I just know it because he is Ray's favorite preacher. Ray said when he is a young man, "When I preach, I want to be like Joel Osteen." I am telling you, this world is not. If you are a member of his church and you have a problem in your marriage or your kids, just try to get an appointment with him. I promise you the day after he is done, he is on a jet plane someplace else speaking at \$25,000 an hour. But that is where we are at. We think God is in all of that. I am here to tell you, God is not in all of that. We are living in a time where it is hard to find God without the Book. We are living in a time where it is hard. It looks like He is there. It looks like He is everywhere, but He is nowhere. But He is behind the scenes.

We have missed the great truth. Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, putting them in the right order. Do not take what I am about to say wrong, but we have missed the great truth. The great truth is this: God is finished with the Gentiles. Oh, there are still Gentiles getting saved, and this is a Gentile church, and the church is still alive because it is still here. But in God's mind, He is already moving. Look at the Middle East. Look what God is doing over there. Look what He did in 1917 and 1918 and 1948 and the events that have taken place. Look at that thing; it lays it out. In God's mind, He is finished with the Gentiles. He is just gathering in the last grapes of a disease-ridden vineyard that is diseased and sick and eaten alive with its own self, that used to be a vibrant vineyard for God. He is reaching through this diseased, sin-ridden vineyard, picking out the last grapes. One of these days, He is going to have His grapes full, and God is going to say, "Come up hither, brother," and it is going to be God's full attention to the nation of Israel.

God's people cannot get that. You know why? Because it is what I go back to earlier. They do not have any understanding of where they are at in relationship to the coming of Christ. I heard one of these great preachers say a while ago, he says, "You know what? Jesus could not come for another thousand years." Yeah, you hope so. Most Christians would love to hear that He probably will not come. Even the best of you, when I start praying and talking about, "Oh, I wish He would come back right now," does that not make a little sickness in your stomach? I know some of us are legitimate. Some of you say, "Well, I do not want Him to come back yet because I have not really done anything for God yet." I love that. I appreciate that. Some of you women with child would say, "Well, I do not want Him to come. I want at least to..." I understand that. God understands that.

By the way, little Jackie, she is in the hospital right now, probably having her baby. We need to pray for her. She got up this morning, and she is so sick of carrying this kid around. I am glad too, because I was going to True Value Hardware and buy her a wheelbarrow to carry that stomach around there. Bless her little heart. I understand those things. I realize those things, but God's people, for the most part, they do not want Him to come back. If you give them one prayer and you say, "You ask any prayer, I will give you one prayer," it would be for a million dollars. It

would be to win the lottery. It would be, "Make this girl love me," or "Give me this," or "Give me that house," or "Give me that job promotion." That is where it would be.

Brother, do not you ever give me that prayer, Lord. Do not even think about giving that prayer to me. Do not ever come down to my house and say, "Bob, I will tell you what. I am going to give you one prayer, and if you say it, whatever it is, I do not care what it is, I am going to give it to you." Brother, if the rapture happens tonight, you will know I got that prayer, because it will be, "Lord, get me out of here." He said, "Well, I cannot get you out with everybody else." And I would say, "You know what? That is their problem, Lord. I am done. Out, out, out." Perspective, perspective.

When you see Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, you have to see it. What you see in Esther, Nehemiah, and Ezra is God corralling the circumstances. In this church age, God is looking down through the four million Jews that would not go back, just like He is looking through the mirage of God's people who claim to be saved, claim to be on their way to heaven, but will not build the work. He is looking for the right man and the right woman they can put in the right place at the right time to do the right work. That is where we are at. What a privilege for you and for me as a man or a woman to be that person for God. What a privilege.

The theme of Esther is the dethroning of a Gentile queen, Vashti, and the setting up of a Jewish queen, Esther, showing you doctrinally God's timeframe for the Second Coming, showing you inspirationally the time that we are in now. It is the only book where God is not mentioned, but God is everywhere behind the scenes. He is just working with the right man in the right place at the right time, and everybody else cannot find Him. You know what this church is about in its simplest form? At the end of the day, for every young lady, every young man, every mom and dad, every couple, it is basically about, at the bottom line, for those who want to find Him.

VII. The Gates of Ministry: Fellowship and Preaching

Let us look at the last three gates here. The sixth gate, we have talked about the Sheep Gate, the Fish Gate, the Old Gate, the Valley Gate, the Dung Gate. Today we are going to look at the Fountain Gate.

- The Fountain Gate (Fellowship)
- The Water Gate (Preaching and Teaching)

VIII. The Gates of Ministry: The Second Coming

- The Horse Gate and the Eastern Gate

IX. Three Keys for Ministry and Building the Church

I want to give you three things here, and then I am done. Someday, boys, you are going to pastor. Someday somebody will pastor this church. Certainly many of you will lead this church in areas of ministry. I want you to know what I am about to give you, and you can kind of separate this

out from everything else I have given you. But these are three other great things that God gave me out of Esther and Nehemiah when I put this whole thing together. It really helped me in ministry, and I would be derelict in my duty if I did not give them to you today.

1. The first thing we have talked about many, many times, and we will continue to talk about: the right man, right place, right time.

2. Methods of Opposition

3. The last thing, the third thing. I do not remember who this Christian was, but on a Bible study a number of years ago, I do not remember if it was a private Bible study or where it came from. Somebody said, "You know what? I read through the book of Ezra. The book of Ezra, to me, is just a really boring book. I just do not understand it. I guess I did not get anything out of it. To me, it was just a story that did not mean anything. It is one of the most boring books in the Bible." My response, probably, was something like, "Well, darling, you only get out of something what you put into it." But that thing stuck with me. That lady does not know it to this day, but she gave me one of the greatest keys to the Book that I have ever found. Because I thought about that, and I thought to myself, "You know what? Reading it, as she did, it looks boring. But reading it from God's standpoint, it is not boring at all."

About that time, God showed me something. It probably was one of the greatest things I ever learned being a pastor. Because I got reading down here, and I remember I had just taken this study and broken down the study of the three types of Christians. John, remember we talked about that of the 12 apostles? Some bear fruit 100-fold, some 60-fold, some 30-fold. I had just studied that out in my Bible. God showed me that in this chapter, in this absolute boring chapter, God showed me that when you build a work, as a pastor, as a leader, as somebody who is the right man, the right place, and the right time, when the opposition comes, it not only comes from without, it comes from within. I began to see the three types of people that put the gates up. I thought to myself, "Those are the exact three kinds of people you have in every church." Look at this, incredible.

- Three Types of Builders1.) The Sanctified Builders (Nehemiah 3:1)Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests, and they builded the sheep gate; they sanctified it, and set up the doors of it; even unto the tower of Meah they sanctified it, unto the tower of Hananeel.This is concerning the Sheep Gate. It says, "the high priest and his brethren, they built the sheep gate." It says, "when they built it, they sanctified it." That is a great concept. Here is somebody that when they built the Sheep Gate, they understood that the Sheep Gate was different than all the other gates. They understood and recognized that the Sheep Gate was based on the concept of sacrifice. Here is a group of people in any church that they realize and understand that when they get the thing going, it says there that Eliashib, the high priest, rose up with his brethren, the priests, and they built the Sheep Gate. They sanctified it. They understood there was something about what they were doing. There was more to it than just a bunch of gates. They understood God is in this. This is something that God wanted. We understand what this means to God. When we do our work, we are going to do it by the Book. So when they did the Sheep Gate, you know what they did historically? They got around and said, "Come on, boys, let us get down here. Now, God, we thank You for bringing

us back. We know that Jerusalem is Your city, and God, we know that You have a plan, and we want to fulfill it. God, humble us, help us. We are going to do the Sheep Gate. We know the Sheep Gate is where the sheep come in. We know that we have to have a sacrifice for God because God demands a sacrifice. Lord, I am praying that You will just mold us together. Let us put this gate on right. Let us get the hinges straight. Let us get the locks lined up. Let us do everything the way it meant something to them." It was not, "Yes, come on, let us put the gate on."

- 2.) The Earnest Workers (Nehemiah 3:20) After him Baruch the son of Zabbai earnestly repaired the other piece, from the turning of the wall unto the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest. Here is a group that worked earnestly. They just never sanctified anything. To them, it was just a job. "Come on, the church needs to have this done. Come on, we have to get this going. Come on, we have to set these things up down here so the kids can have Sunday school. Come on, we have to do this." They did not see the importance of every gate. They did not see that it was not just one gate. It was nine gates. Every one is as important as the other gate. They have to look at it from God's standpoint. It is just not a job.
- 3.) The Nobles Who Don't Put Their Necks to the Work (Nehemiah 3:5) And next unto them the Tekoites repaired; but their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord. There is your third group. Oh, they are going to come to church every week, but they are just not going to get involved. They are not putting their neck on the line for anything. They are not going to step out by faith. They are not going to trust God in this, trust God in that. They are going to be there, but they are just going to give whatever the minimum is. They are going to do whatever they can do not to do anything. Oh, they will be there. But it will not be anything special. It will be just like, "Well, I have to go to church this morning. Well, I have not been there for six weeks. Probably have to go today." That is the time.

Three kinds of people will build any church. You will find the ones that see God in every little detail. They see the importance of Sunday morning, Thursday night, their own personal time. They will structure and discipline their lives. Everything around because they know that every little jot and tittle, every little thing that you do is part of God's training to make you the right man in the right place at the right time.

Then you have those that just show up. Oh, they will do anything you ask them to do: take the chair down, put them up, do this, paint the wall, stand on your head in the corner. They are fine. They just never come to the place where they ever see God in the thing. It is just a job to them. It is just a job. It is just part of going to church. They do not see a difference between doing this than they did when they did this at work. They will complain about working in the nursery. When they look at the nursery, they say, "Well, I do not want to miss Bob." They do not stop and think that the future of our church is right down that hall. They do not think about that. They think about themselves. They think about, "Why do I want to do this? I want to be here." You cannot always do everything you want to do. Why do we not just all come in here and just let them put a big fence out there and just let them all run loose till we are done?

You have to see that a church, every aspect, everything, everything. I told the people when they had our accident come in, we had a serious accident a couple of weeks ago. This is not a

criticism of anybody in particular. It is just a mindset that we fall into. We have these partitions we use down there to kind of wall the things out. We had two guys, a guy and a guy, that when the partition fell over, it hurt the woman's back, and hurt her back pretty seriously. The other guy got a busted lip out of it. The bottom line is this: I do not mean this bad, and I am not going to do it. I am glad it hit the guys that could take it. If those things would have fallen on a little kid, it would have killed one of them. Do not take this wrong. But you know why those things fell? Do not take this wrong. Take it any way you want to take it. You know why it fell? Because whoever put them up, it was just a job. "Go in and get them. Flop them down. Get on with what you are going." Nobody stopped and thought, "If this fell on a kid, it might kill them." Hello? We cannot think that way. We have got to see that everything that we do, every jot and tittle of this church, this church is important as the major events.

You are always going to have people who see it that way. They see God in everything that happens. They see a purpose behind it all. It does not matter what they have to do, where they do it. They know they are components. It all goes together for the work of God. Then you have those that just, they are hirelings. They will do whatever you tell them to do, but they are not going to look any farther than that. They do not see the end result. Then you have those that say, "Well, I will go, but I am not getting involved. I am going on Thursday night. I have too much I have to do. Well, I am not going to do that." "Yeah, that was a great sermon. I have to get that and study that out. But you know what? I am pretty busy." They just are not going to stick their necks out for the Lord. They are not going to put it on the line.

I want to tell you something. Being a Christian today, being a man of God in the right place at the right time, the right woman in the right place at the right time, it requires you to step out by faith and stick your neck on the line. The greatest position you can be in as a child of God, the greatest absolute, without a doubt, position you can ever find yourself in as a Christian is hanging out on a limb. That is bending down, and you hear a crack, and you look back, and God is standing at the base of that tree, looking at you with a hacksaw in His hand and a smile on His face. Hanging yourself out there that if God does not come through for you, you are cooked. We cannot even get there today. But that is what it takes. That is what it takes to be the right man in the right place at the right time. That is what it takes to be not the ones who just do the work earnestly or somebody who said, "I am not going to stick my neck out on it," versus somebody who says, "You know what? It is God's work. Every part of us, God's work. It is important, and I am going to make sure that if it fails, I am not the weak link."

Nine gates. Nine gates. Building toward our anniversary Sunday, that we look back and see this is where we have come from. This is what God has done, and this is what we need to do.

Every head bowed, every eye closed. Father, we thank You and praise You for the Lord Jesus.