

COME, LET US REBUILD THE WALL

Nehemiah 2:11-3:32 (Key Verse: 2:17)

“Then I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.””

In today’s passage we are going to learn from Nehemiah who took the next step in fulfilling the mission that God put in his heart to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and its gates which were in ruins. When Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, he did not share his plans with the Jews there, rather he first examined the conditions of the wall. We are therefore, going to learn why he first examined wall before gathering the Jews to share with them what the Lord has put in his heart. Furthermore, we are going to learn from Nehemiah how he could encourage the Jews there who were in a discouraged state (hopeless, downcast, and low spirited) to rebuild the wall. May God be with us all today, to receive one word on how to encourage one another and our sheep to rebuild the wall of God.

The passage today begins with Nehemiah who finally arrived in Jerusalem escorted by soldiers after the Lord God showed his gracious hand unto him and moving the king of Persia Artaxerxes’ heart to allow him to come to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall and its ruined gates. What did Nehemiah do when he arrived in Jerusalem? He stayed in Jerusalem for three days, possibly taking some rest and greeting the brothers and sisters there, and thereafter he did something unexpected. Let us look **12-13**: *“I set out during the night with a few others. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on. 13 By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire.* When Nehemiah came to Jerusalem, one may say he was ready to begin the work, he had permission from the king Artaxerxes, he had resources such as timber to get started with the rebuilding of the burnt down gates. Most importantly what he had to share was good news, so one would think he should have immediately shared with the Jews in Jerusalem. But here we learn that Nehemiah did not tell anyone about what God had put in his heart, rather before doing anything else he went out in the night to examine the broken-down wall and its gates which had been destroyed by fire.

Why did Nehemiah, go out to examine the wall and the broken-down gates before sharing with the Jews what God had put in his heart? Nehemiah wanted to understand the condition of the wall and the gates, he wanted to understand the amount of work that needed to be done. He wanted to understand this, so that he can have a clear plan of what needs to be done. As gospel workers, when God puts something in our hearts, we need to take the time to examine the mission that God gives to us and the amount of work that needs to be done. Furthermore, Nehemiah only heard about the wall that had been broken down, and the burnt down gate, he was heart broken of the fact, but he did not have the full measure of the pain that the Jews in Jerusalem had. When he went out examining, he could fully understand them, their pain, hopelessness, and low spirit. When Nehemiah, went examining the wall and the burnt down gates in the night, he could have clear idea what needs to be done, also he could device an appealing case to present to the Jews. Nehemiah wanted to have a clear plan that will appeal to the Jews, giving them confidence that it can be done, because he needed their help, the work of rebuilding the wall was not a one-man job, but he needed those who were in Jerusalem to participate. In **verse 16** it says: *“The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work.”* The plan that God planted in Nehemiah is also to restore the hopeless, downcast and low-spirited hearts of the people of Israel, through doing the work of rebuilding the wall and the city gates. That is why Nehemiah wanted them to participate in the rebuilding, that is why it was important that they have confidence that it can be done.

Just like in Nehemiah’s time, many people live with hopeless, downcast, and low-spirited hearts today because of various reasons, the economy, unemployment, fees, crime, absent fathers, broken families, and many other things. To restore the people’s hearts, I believe God continues to plant his vision in our hearts, vision to preach the gospel and reveal Jesus who has power to release the people from the bondage of all these suffering, to restore their hearts to be filled with peace in Jesus Christ our Lord. To do these, requires examining of the environment. For example, as a fellowship leader for El-Shaddai, I am learning that I need to have the heart and wisdom of Nehemiah to examine the environment on Wits campus, so that I can have a clear and appealing direction to share with my fellowship members on how to do God’s work on campus, how to help restore the hearts of campus students to be filled with joy in the

Lord Jesus Christ. When UBF missionaries pioneered university campuses, before they could do anything they went on campus, examining it, praying and thereafter with a clear plan they went out inviting students and raising them as disciples of Jesus Christ. So, when God plants vision in our hearts, let us take time to examine the mission field, let us not be hasty, but thoroughly examine, and then invite others to join us to execute effectively.

What then happened when Nehemiah had finished examining the broken-down wall and the burnt down gates? How did he break down the news to the Jews in Jerusalem? Did he select the strongest men of Judah, those who were skilled in building, did he approach the rich men in Judah who had the means to finance the project? Let us look at our **key verse (17)** to see how he shared the news about what God had planted in his heart: *“Then I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.”* Firstly, Nehemiah did not select specific individuals, but rather he shared what God had planted in his heart with everyone, the Jews, the priests, nobles, official and many others. His first words to them, touched their hearts deeply, he said: *“You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire.”* Nehemiah did not command, or instruct the people around, but with a broken heart he appealed to the people with their reality, he said, *“You see the trouble we are in”* with this Nehemiah led the people to think about their state of trouble. In the past the people just accepted their state, they had given up, but now Nehemiah challenged them to think and to not accept it as a norm. Through these, Nehemiah challenged them to think about the possibility of changing this state.

Furthermore, Nehemiah said: *Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.*”, here Nehemiah encouraged the spirit of partnership, yes God planted this vision in his heart, but for this work to be successful a spirit of partnership was required. The spirit of partnership was effective because it meant all people can give input in the rebuilding of the wall. Through this Nehemiah, showed the people that he is willing to listen to their ideas and execute. Furthermore, Nehemiah said: *“let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.”* Here we see again, Nehemiah who touched the people’s hearts, revealing the impact of the broken wall and burnt down gates in the people’s hearts. The reality is that, because of the broken-down wall and burnt down gates, the people remained in great shame, fear, insecurity, and this affected their sense of being, sense of confidence. And so, he said, come, let us rebuild the wall so that we may no longer be in disgrace, so that we may no longer be mockery of our enemies. Nehemiah encouraged the people of Jerusalem to *“Come, rebuild the wall”* not just for the sake of bringing up the wall, but for the sake of restoring their spiritual dignity, to give glory to God and to honor him.

To further encourage the people in Jerusalem, Nehemiah shared with them his testimony concerning the hand of God in this vision, that he planted in his heart. Let us look at **verse 18a**: *“I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me.”* The people were indeed amazed when they learnt about the gracious hand of God on Nehemiah, they were truly encouraged, and the hand of God in Nehemiah’s life gave them confidence that indeed it is possible, the God of heaven is able and will help them to restore the wall and their dignity. And glory to God, for in **verse 18b** they replied to Nehemiah saying: *“Let us start rebuilding.” So, they began this good work.”*

However, just when the people of Jerusalem were ready to begin the work, after Nehemiah appealed to them with great encouragement, an opposition arose. Let us look at **verse 19**: *“But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us. “What is this you are doing?” they asked. “Are you rebelling against the king?””* Here we see Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab mocking and ridiculing Nehemiah and the people of Jerusalem about the rebuilding of the wall. Both Sanballat and Tobiah, were men of influence, with strong relations to the Jewish priestly line. Tobiah was a prominent name (**meaning: Yahweh is good**) in priestly families, and Sanballat was connected by marriage to priestly families. So, it was strange for these men to oppose the rebuilding of the work of God. Today as well, when God puts something in our hearts and just when we are making progress, we may experience opposition. This opposition can even come from places we do not expect, it can come from our family members, our friends, even from fellow Christians believers, people we expect full support from.

When Nehemiah saw these opposition from Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem he responded to them in **verse 20** saying: *“.... “The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it.”* Nehemiah did not justify himself to the opposition by pulling out letters

from the king to prove to them they have permission to rebuild the wall, he did not enter into a debate with them. But rather, with confidence and boldness, he told them that the *"The God of heaven will give them success"* Here Nehemiah, revealed to the opposition that the rebuilding of the wall is the work of God, not the work men. He revealed to them that strength to rebuild the wall will not come from men or even the king, but from God himself. The strength to carry out the work of God, to preach the gospel effectively on Wits campus, does not come from our abilities and capabilities, but from God. This brought so much encouragement to the people of Jerusalem, to look at God rather than their strength in fulfilling the task of rebuilding the wall. Furthermore, Nehemiah said: *"We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it."* Here Nehemiah, plainly pointed out the problem of the opposition (Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem), which was their lack of knowledge of who God is, their opposition revealed that even though they had very strong connection to the priestly line, they did not know God and did not live for him, but rather their own ideas and power. And so, Nehemiah, did not allow them to hinder their work but pointed out their spiritual limitation. This further encouraged the people in Jerusalem, to rebuild the wall, depending on the God of heaven who is able to grant them strength to rebuild the wall, to honor him and bring glory to him.

After receiving this great encouragement from Nehemiah, the people of Jerusalem from all spheres presented themselves to God to the rebuilding of the wall, starting from Eliaship the high priest and his fellow priests who went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate. They dedicated it and set its doors in place, building as far as the Tower of the Hundred, which they dedicated, and as far as the Tower of Hananel. Having the high priest and his fellow priest, start the building set the tone of the work, that it was the work of God, not a construction project to satisfy men's desires and wishes, but to bring honor and glory to God. The work of the priest was followed by that of men and women from diverse backgrounds, goldsmiths, perfume makers, rulers of half districts, daughters of rulers of half districts, Levites and many more. Different kinds of people participated on the work of God. This work was not only for the gifted, talented, or experienced, but rather for all. Great progress was made in the work of God, not because of talent, but rather because the people were willing with great passion and desire to do the work of God. To be effective in the work of God, we do not necessarily need talent or gifts, but rather we need to have the willingness and passion to carry out the work of God, to honor and give glory to him.

Conclusion

From today's passage we have learnt that when God puts something in our hearts, to go out and fulfill his mission, we need to have the wisdom to first go out and examine the mission field so that we can have a clear direction on what needs to be done, before sharing with others to participate in our mission. We have also learnt from Nehemiah, how to encourage others to participate in the vision that God has placed in our hearts, first we should not impose our ideas but rather we should appeal to them to see how much the world is in ruin, how sin is tormenting the people, Nehemiah said: *"You see the trouble we are in"*. Furthermore, we should have a spirit of partnership, encourage others to work together with us saying: *"Come, let us rebuild the wall of God."* We have also learnt that doing the work of God has much deeper meaning, building the wall in Jerusalem was not just about the construction, but rather it was the work of restoring the dignity of the Jews in Jerusalem, removing their shame, hopelessness, fear, insecurity and restoring their relationship with God.

We have also learnt the power of encouraging others through sharing our testimony with them, concerning the gracious hand of God in our lives. We have also learnt that when do the work of God, opposition will arise even from places we do not expect, even from those very close to us. And glory to God, for through Nehemiah, we have learnt how to overcome opposition, through remembering that the rebuilding of the wall is the work of God and not ours, so we should look at God to give us strength, not our own abilities. Lastly, we learnt that the work of God, is not reserved for a few who are gifted and talented, but we all can participate. When we avail ourselves, with willingness and passion to do the work of God, God will bless us greatly to achieve much greater things than those who are gifted and talented yet disinterested in the work of God. Let us therefore actively avail ourselves to do the work of God, sincerely preparing for Bible studies weekly, writing testimony, daily bread, Bible reading, depend on God to overcome opposition and all kinds of temptation. And God in his great wisdom will bless us.