

## “Everybody’s Got a Job” // Nehemiah 2:17–3:32 // Nehemiah # 3<sup>1</sup> // Su 1130

### Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

Great question.

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

**People:** *Thanks be to God.*

You may be seated.

It can be difficult to figure out what exactly to do with a passage like this one. How many of you have **had the experience of getting into a Bible reading plan**--you’re all amped up; this is going to be the year you read through the Bible! And everything is going great and then

<sup>1</sup> Sources consulted: Eric Mason, *Nehemiah for You*, (London, UK: The Good Book Company, 2022); Andy Stanley, *Visioneering*, (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 1999); Tim Keller, “[Laboring for a God who Fights for Us](#)”, June 28, 2014, The

Gospel Coalition’s National Women’s Conference; Skip Heitzig, “[Extreme Makeover: Jerusalem Edition](#)”, April 20, 2005, Calvary Church. And others as noted throughout.

you hit a list of names like this one--and it's like when you were a kid and you were running into the ocean at full speed and you hit the water... it's like you're suddenly trying to run through wet cement. Y'all, so many resolutions to read the Bible wither and die in biblical lists of names like this. Am I right? Other people in your small group are talking about their quiet times and how much they're getting out of them, and they've got (sigh) tears in their eyes and you're like, "😓 I've been reading about a bunch of Meremoths who begat some Meshullams... and I'm pretty sure I fell asleep somewhere in the middle of all of it... and I've gotten ZERO edification out of my quiet time the last few days."

**I freely admit to you that when I get to lists of names like this in my Bible reading I start skimming--and--brace yourself--I think that's fine.** I don't feel guilty about that *AT ALL*. **BUT...** these lists do serve important purposes in the Bible, and it's all inspired by God and his holy Word, and so you should understand what those purposes are, and then after you understand the purpose for a list, you can skim... a little.

Let me first remind you historically what is going on in the book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah leads the third part of a **3-wave restoration project (-->-->-->)** that God was bringing to his people.

- **The first wave was led by Zerubbabel.** Zerubbabel, 538 B.C., had overseen the rebuilding of the Temple and the restoration of public worship. (That's the first half of the book of Ezra).
- **The second wave was led by Ezra, 458 B.C., who reacquainted the Israelites with the Word of God.** He literally read the Word over the people after they'd returned to Jerusalem, explained the meaning of it to them, and called them to obey it.<sup>2</sup>

- **And then finally, we have Nehemiah, who in 445 BC** led in the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem--walls that would give the city cohesion and restore order and allow economic life to flourish again.
- **One reformer** I haven't mentioned yet, btw, who worked alongside these guys, somewhere in *here* (474 BC), **was Esther.** Esther served as Queen in Persia. Esther had been married to King Artaxerxes' father Ahasereus (King Artaxerxes, being the King mentioned in Nehemiah 1 and 2). In fact, some scholars suggest that the queen listed in **Nehemiah 2:6** was Esther. It certainly would have been possible that she was still alive even after her husband had died and she was still sitting on the throne. Scholars say the fact that Nehemiah somewhat randomly mentions the presence of the queen in vs 6 suggests that she had some kind of special significance to him--and that might have been because she was a fellow Jew named Esther.
- Either way, Queen Esther had stood up in the government to protest a racial genocide being planned against her people.

Which leads me to ***our first observation:***

**(1) God's plan of restoration involves spiritual awakening** (that was through Zerubbabel and Ezra), **social reform** (that was through Esther), **and economic flourishing** (that's what we see here in Nehemiah).

Tim Keller says, **"(Leading the return from the exile) you have male and female, lay and clergy. You have people working for spiritual maturity, economic**

<sup>2</sup> This takes place about 458 BC.

**flourishing, and better public policy. God uses THEM ALL in his restoration project.”<sup>3</sup>**

God is interested in all 3, and God calls his people to all 3. **The spiritual always comes first--Zerubbabel and Ezra came first. Tony Evans** says this is what made the Civil Rights Movement so effective and enduring in our country. The Civil Rights Movement wasn't perfect, Dr. Evans says, not by a long shot, but movement leaders often prayed before they marched and they put God and his vision of the world at the center of everything, which gave their movement not only a transcendent purpose but also an enduring permanence.<sup>4</sup>

But, Tony Evans says, leaders in the movement didn't stop with the spiritual. They went on to call for social change.

Wherever the gospel is preached, social reforms always follow and then that's followed by economic flourishing. There's **an economist named Barry Asmus** who co-wrote a book with theologian Wayne Grudem called *The Poverty of Nations* in which they demonstrate that in societies that adopt a Christian worldview human and economic flourishing is consistently the result. And that's because, they demonstrate, the Christian worldview is an expression of God's design, so it shouldn't surprise us that people flourish as they operate according to that design. It's like reading the Owner's Manual and operating the machine according to it.

**Now, some of you say, “Well, of course they say that; they're Christians.” But see, they're not alone in their findings. Noted British Historian Tom Holland says the same thing. Tom Holland is *not* a professed believer** (and btw, I'm talking about Tom Holland the

historian, not Tom Holland, Spiderman). Holland says--look through the best parts of Western history, and you'll find Christianity at the center of our best social reforms. The abolition of slavery, the rise of women's suffrage, child labor laws; universities, hospitals, the social safety net—those leading the way in these things were Christians. In fact, at the beginning of the twentieth century, every hospital in sub-Saharan Africa was started by Christian missions.<sup>5</sup>

In fact, of particular interest to me was an article written by NYT journalist **Nicolas Kristoff**. Kristoff is an atheist who writes a lot in the NYT about ending human rights abuses around the world. In this article he said that wherever he went in the world studying social reform, he couldn't get over the fact that just about EVERYWHERE he found reforms he found Christians at the center of them. Hospitals, non-profits, empowerment programs in poor neighborhoods ... over and over, it was Christians driving the work. In fact, he said, it drove him nuts, because he was trying to convince *secular* people to care for the poor, but he had to admit that Christians had a centuries-long head start on him.

What's my point? My point is that just because you're not called to do what I do--to work in the church--doesn't mean you don't have a role in building a part of Jerusalem's wall; in manifesting Christ's kingdom. The gospel will send many of you into places of social reform and economic progress. So-called secular jobs. Medicine. Education. Helping people buy their first home. One of those will be the focus of your divinely-placed burden; your Nehemiah dream.

(Now, I do pray that for a lot of you--particularly you young adults or those of you in college--I pray that God will call a lot of you into

<sup>3</sup> Tim Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*

<sup>4</sup> Tony Evans

<sup>5</sup> D.A. Carson.

church leadership. I've told you, the #1 predictor of any Christian movement in history is how many young men and women they are raising up into ministry, so I want us to do that well.<sup>6</sup> Honestly, one of my pet peeves is when people think that all the great leaders should go into business or government or law where they can make a lot of money or make a real difference and those who can't cut it in those arenas should go into church work. Sure, I'll admit, this profession is not the most lucrative--but I think some of the greatest leaders in the world should be going into God's church. I mean--*what a calling! What a privilege!* BUT--my point is, not all of you will be called to lead in the church but that doesn't mean God doesn't have a place for you on that wall, manifesting his kingdom.)

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

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

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

*bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft."*<sup>7</sup>

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

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

That leads me to...

**(2) God's plan of restoration involves everyone**

**When I read the list in chapter 3,** what stands out to me is the repetition of the words "*next to.*" "*Next to*" Eliashib were the sons of Hassenaah and "*next to*" them Meremoth and "*next to*" him were Shallum and his daughters..." All working on different parts of the wall, and most the section right out in front of their houses.

Commentators tell us Nehemiah's point in presenting the list this way is to show us that everyone was involved.

**Scholars say the way the work happens in Nehemiah is the culmination of a progression** we've seen building throughout the Old Testament. At the beginning, God brought his plan into being through select individuals. **Spiritual superheroes** like Moses or Joshua or Samson or Deborah did all the work--but here, at the tail end of the Old Testament (remember: Nehemiah is last chronological book in

<sup>6</sup> Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America*

<sup>7</sup> Ex 31:1-5

OT), we're seeing God start to use everyone in Israel to bring about his Kingdom.

- You see, one of the things that is significant about Nehemiah 3 is what it *doesn't* say. It doesn't say, "Nehemiah did this and then Nehemiah did that," but, rather, "this rando over here you've never heard of did this and this lady over there did that and this guy's daughters were working on this."
- **Everyone** had a role in restoring Jerusalem.

This diffusion of the work continued on in the New Testament. In Acts 2, when the Holy Spirit fell on the church, Peter said that this was a fulfillment of the promise that in the last days God's Spirit would be poured out on "all flesh" and "your sons and daughters will prophesy." "**Your sons and daughters**" means ordinary people--every Christian, would prophesy. You see, again: in the Old Testament, it was only special, select individuals who prophesied--people with names like Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Habakkuk. But now, Peter says, the Spirit of prophecy is given to all believers. **Everyone** has a spot on the wall, a place they are divinely empowered for mission.

**YOU** have a role. Hear me: In the Kingdom of God, there's no such thing as a passive consumer. It's like our friend **David Platt** says, "God didn't save you so he could sanitize you and set you on a sanctified shelf; he saved you to send you into service." A Christian who has not embraced his or her role in the mission has not fully become a disciple of Jesus yet. Or, like Charles Spurgeon said: When it comes to Jesus' Kingdom, you're either a missionary or an impostor. A missionary or a mission field. There's no 3rd option!

I tell you this all the time: the call to get involved in the mission of God is not a secondary call you receive from Jesus--where he appears to you like he did to Moses at a burning bush and says to you, "Now, I want you to start serving me." No, the call to get involved in the

mission was *included* in the call to follow Jesus. **Matthew 4:19**, Jesus said, "**Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.**" Which means when you accepted the call to follow Jesus, you accepted the call to mission. There's no such thing as a person following Jesus who is not engaged in the mission. Engaging in the mission is **what it means** to follow Jesus!

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

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

- My **pastor had challenged me to read Romans 7x**, and one morning in my QT I was reading the book of Romans and I don't know how to fully describe this but it just became real to me what it meant for people to die without Jesus, and the fact there were still 2.2 billion who had never heard his name. What I knew in my head I felt in my heart. It was my Nehemiah 2:12 moment.
- So, I started to pray, "**Lord, please let me do something about that. LORD, SHOW ME WHAT I CAN DO. Here am I, Lord, send me!**" And I sensed the Lord saying, "Now, at last, you're praying the right prayer."
- You see, I'd been sitting around **passively praying**, "**God, if you want to do something in my life**, show me in a burning bush"

when what God wanted me doing was **actively** praying, “Lord, show me how my life can best be used for the spread of the gospel--the question is not IF I’m called, only where and how.”

- We talk about finding God’s will--it’s not lost! (2 Peter 3:9)
- Jim Elliot: “You don’t need to sit around waiting on a VOICE when you’ve already been given a VERSE.”
- So, I asked my pastor: What should I do with this? He answered... your desires?

Every believer should ask God how his or her talents and gifts can best be used in bringing Christ’s kingdom to earth. We should go from passive willingness to serve in God’s mission to an active quest to figure out what divine desires God has put in our hearts and special gifts he has put in our hands.

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

What’s your role? Are you seeking **SOMETHING**? You know, I’ll be honest--maybe some of you have just grown accustomed to the brokenness around you. Pastor **Dustin**, our Young Adults pastor here, pointed out to me that a lot of these people mentioned in this chapter had been living in Jerusalem for 50 years before Nehemiah led them to start rebuilding. They’d gotten used to the broken down walls; they walked past them every day and didn’t even think about them. Maybe **YOU’VE** gotten used to broken down walls in our city.

- I feel that when people complain to me about the problems caused by our church’s growth. **Listen to this:** AT MOST, the max number of people involved in any significant way in church in the Triangle is **56%**. (And that’s being *really, really* generous with what it means to be involved. I mean, drive down your street at 9:30 and see how many people aren’t going to church, and you know it’s not 56% of people in the Triangle who go to church each Sunday!) But even if it’s a full 56%, that means at least 44% of the

people in the Triangle aren’t Christians. With a population of 2.4 million, that means there AT LEAST a million people here don’t know Jesus. Have you just gotten used to that? Are you ok with that number of people going into a Christless eternity? When we push you to invite people to Easter, that’s not a vanity project for us pastors so I can have a number to boast about. It is because literally **hundreds of thousands** of our neighbors are lost and need Jesus. Parts of our city are spiritual rubble.

- People always ask me: “Pastor, when are you going to stop pushing the Summit Church to grow? When is enough, enough?” And I say, “When there’s not a million lost people still in the Triangle, that’s when!” I always say to these people, “Why are you so focused on the size of our church AND NOT on the number of lost people in our community? We’re not trying to grow a megachurch, we’re trying to reach a megacity. We’re not trying to build an empire--we send out people all the time to plant other churches--sometimes right here in our backyard, like Redeemer Midtown or Waypoint. But we’re never going to intentionally stop growing here. People say, “Well, you’re just into growth; you’re all about numbers.” And I’m like, “Absolutely I am. I’m into numbers of people saved. And numbers of marriages restored. Or addicts delivered... Which of these people do you want us to stop reaching? I always say, “Yeah, maybe you’re a little inconvenienced by the parking lot jam or how crowded the lobby feels sometimes, but you know who *LOVES* a growing church? That parent of the prodigal son who has just started to come back to church because he got involved with our young adults; or that wife who has been praying for her husband for years and he has

just started to come to Summit. They're grateful that our church created room for "ONE MORE."<sup>8</sup>

Everyone has a role, and there's plenty to do.

By the way, did you notice **vs 5?** And next to them the Tekoites repaired, but their nobles would not stoop to serve their Lord.

- What you should learn from that: God takes note of those who do not serve. In every movement, every church, including this one, there is a group of people who think they're too important to get their hands dirty; who enjoy the show but don't want to help build the wall.
- I've known people here who told me, y'all, straight up, they weren't working in the kids' ministry. One married guy with kids actually told me, "I don't want to volunteer in kids ministry; let the single people do that." I was like, "Get out of here. What, you holding out for a management position?" **My son Adon** (16 year old) uses a little phrase I love. He says: **"If serving is beneath you; leadership is beyond you."**
- Every person who considers this church home should be involved in some way in sacrificial serving and giving.
- Might I graciously ask: if God made a list of those engaged in ministry here at Summit, how many of us would have an epithet like this--**"these 'nobles' would not stoop to serve their Lord."**
- (And, by the way, one more thing before I move on to #3: Did you notice that for a lot of these people, what they were doing was clearly outside of their skill set? **Vs 8** talks about perfume makers... These dudes at some point decided outdoor physical labor was not for them; they were going into the fragrance industry. And yet, in this chapter, these dudes weren't making scented candles, "'Serenity by Jan' that provides heavenly fragrances while you work!" or something

<sup>8</sup> I get the phrase 'One more!' from our friend Joby Martin!

like that. No, this was not the time for that. Help was needed *on the wall*.

- Listen, it's great to find a ministry that fits your passions and skills, and I want to help you do that--I'm really committed to that and we haven't done a great job with that--but, hear me... when the kids' class is closed because of a lack of leaders, well, that means someone's not getting to hear the gospel. Sometimes we have to walk away from our perfume making and work on the broken part of the wall right in front of us.
- **Everyone has a role.** Listen, we end every service here with the phrase, "YOU ARE SENT." Do you know what that means? Or do you just think, "He's sending us to lunch" or "sending us into that meat grinder they call a parking lot and this is his way of saying 'get out of here...'" *That's not what we mean.* Do you know WHERE you're sent into the mission? The question is no longer IF you're called, only where and how.

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

If you look at the list Nehemiah gives in chapter 3, another thing that stands out is that none of the people Nehemiah listed were... BUILDERS! There were priests, goldsmiths, perfume makers, someone's teenage daughters, administrative bureaucrats and paper pushers--but not a single professional architect, carpenter or brick-layer was named."<sup>9</sup>

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

<sup>9</sup> from *Daktar*: Viggie Olson

**But that shouldn't be surprising. God builds his greatest things through ordinary people.** That's a theme that runs cover-to-cover through your Bible. He chooses a couple of sterile geriatrics in their 80's to birth his nation in the world. He built his church not with 12 scholars or 12 accomplished governmental leaders or 12 rich guys--he built it with 12 fishermen and blue collar workers.

We're always inspired when we see secular illustrations of this. **For example**, the greatest actor of all time is... Nicolas Cage, of course. But, the 2nd greatest of all time is... Harrison Ford. And I think one of the things I love most about Harrison Ford is his origin story. True story: In the late 1960s, Harrison Ford had some bit parts in a couple of shows like *Gunsmoke*, but nothing that really paid anything--he was basically just an 'extra'--and Harrison Ford had a family to support--a wife and two young sons--so he taught himself carpentry. That was his job. And he got hired to build a door for George Lucas' office on the set of *Star Wars*,<sup>10</sup> and during one of the casting sessions, George Lucas needed an extra who could read lines opposite the auditioning actors. IOW, someone to be a stand-in dummy that the real actors could play off of. So he asked this rando door-building guy to come in and read a few lines opposite these actors, and the rest is history.

That's an amazing-and-rare story in Hollywood, but it's standard fare in the Kingdom of God. **God uses ordinary people, not spiritual superstars, to build his kingdom.**

- **In 1 Corinthians 1:27 Paul says:** "God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; what is low and despised in the world to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God."

- I remember hearing the great Southern Baptist pastor Adrian Rogers giving an amazing illustration of this--I've never forgotten it. He pastored a congregation of several thousand and asked them one Sunday morning... Valedictorian; scholarship; all-American athlete; homecoming week; student body president. He basically went through a bunch of "who's who" type of acknowledgments. When he got done, about 1/3 of the congregation was standing. He had everybody clap and then he said, "For those of you standing, I've got good news and bad news. The good news is, *'God can use you, TOO...* the bad news is you're not his first choice. The people seated next to you are."
- So stop saying, "God, I'm not trained; I can't do anything to help." God says, "Well then you're the one I'm looking for, because it's not about what you can build for me, but what I am building *through* you. In fact, I'd prefer you not be all that talented because then you'd try to take all the credit and probably be convinced your ideas are as good as mine. You'll just clog up the line. I want to use people who plainly recognize that the power comes from me."

And that leads me to our last point...

#### **(4) God restores his city through instruments of grace**

Keep in mind the people you are reading about in this list were the sons and daughters of the people who had been exiled in Babylon because of their sin. They had a checkered past, to say the least. Their families had been so faithless and unbelieving God had kicked them out of the Promised Land.

<sup>10</sup> ["Harrison Ford's First Experience,"](#) Slashfilm.com

Maybe you can relate. Maybe you have a sordid past, or maybe you come from a messed-up family, or maybe you are simply aware of what goes on between your ears throughout the week and you wonder, “How could God ever use someone like me?” Broken. Needy. Prone to wander. Maybe you’re divorced. You just got fired in disgrace. You’re a newly released prisoner. Or still recovering from some mistake that has left you wounded.

I’ve got good news for you, friend: *God builds his church through bad, broken, messed-up people--In fact, he builds his church ONLY through bad, broken, messed-up people, BECAUSE that’s the only kind of people there are.*

Matthew makes the same point in another list of names we aren’t quite sure what to do with: the genealogy of Jesus he gives us in Matthew 1.

I’m going to read it to you, but I want to try to take you through the emotional arc that Jewish people would have gone through when they read this list of names for the first time. I’m going to have you, as an audience, reflect their emotional arc.

**Here’s how it’s gonna work:** I’m going to read the genealogy, and when I give you **THUMBS UP**, that means the Jewish people felt mostly positive about the person I name, and so I want you you respond with **\*\*APPLAUSE\*\***. But when I give you **THUMBS DOWN** that means they were probably most embarrassed by this person, so you **boo or hiss**, preferably both (BOO-HISSSSS). And when I give you the **WAFFLING HAND**, I want you to say, “huhhhh??” because that means you don’t have any idea who this person actually is and they probably didn’t either.

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

Wanna practice? This is for everybody at all campuses-- Chapel Hill? North Durham? Blue Ridge? Garner? You guys ready?

THUMPS UP/  
THUMBS DOWN /  
WAFFLING HAND

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Asa was the father of Hezekiah**, who cleansed the temple and re-established the kingdom (UP!) **and Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh**, who started off great and ruled for 50 years (UP), but turned evil in his final years (DOWN), **and Manasseh was the father of Zerubbabel**, who rebuilt the Temple! (UP) **and Zerubbabel was the father of Abiud** (WAFFLE), **the father of Achim** (WAFFLE), **the father of Eliud** (WAFFLE), **the father of Eleazar** (WAFFLE), **the father of Matthan** (WAFFLE), **the father of** (another) **Jacob** (WAFFLE).

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

You get the point?

(VAMP)

Matthew writes it this way because like Nehemiah he wants you to see that God takes broken people and transforms them into his instruments of grace.

**People look at you** and see a *messed up person*; a *moral failure*; someone whose life is *riddled with mistakes*; maybe you think you *actually were a mistake*; or they see an *adulterer*, a *washout*, a *prostitute*, a *prisoner*, a *nobody*--but God sees someone he plans to use to build an eternal city.

Let me say it plainly for guys in the back: **God has a plan for your life! He wants to use you!** Look at that person next to you! He wants to use that person. Is that hard to believe? That person next to you is AMAZING! He wants to use them to do something with ETERNAL significance. In fact, reach over and touch them. They're special.

**And, all it takes is simple, ordinary, obedience. Yielding yourself to the Holy Spirit to say, "Here am I, Lord, SEND ME."**<sup>11</sup>

Here's how I want to close: **I want us to zoom out again and see Nehemiah's book from the perspective of the whole Bible.** You see, this book is not primarily about a man named Nehemiah putting up some brick and mortar on a piece of real estate in the Middle East.

<sup>11</sup> OPT: George's letter to me

It's not even primarily about you and your dreams. **No, the book of Nehemiah is ultimately about a greater Nehemiah** who would build a truly eternal city, a city of salvation. And there's a strong hit of that right at the end of chapter 2: look at **vs 20**: Some outsiders--some foreigners--come to Nehemiah and say, "What are you doing?"

"Then I replied to them, 'The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem.'" The wording of this is striking to me. "You, foreigners, you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem." That's the exact opposite of what God had promised about Jerusalem. He promised Jerusalem would one day be a blessing to every people group in the world and that foreigners from every nation would come to it and find their salvation in it.

You see, this Jerusalem that Nehemiah is building is clearly not the Jerusalem God had in mind--at least not the ultimate version of it.

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

The Jerusalem that Nehemiah built was one he fought to keep closed to outsiders; the Jerusalem Jesus built is one he died to open up. Nehemiah built walls to keep the impure out of Jerusalem; Jesus tore them down so that whosoever will may come--the blind, the lame, the impure, the defiled, all find their refuge in him.

You see, the truth is: The verdict on all of our lives is THUMBS DOWN... but Jesus built a "city" with foundations that can never be shaken and a temple where we could be saved by grace.

You see, friend, this is the gospel: You can never be righteous enough, pure enough, good enough, to earn God's favor. No, Jesus offers you his righteousness as a gift--A GIFT ENTIRELY OF GRACE--purchased for you at the cross. It's called "gift-righteousness," meaning it's not righteousness you earn for yourself by being good enough; it's righteousness God gives you as a gift, purchased for you by the blood of Jesus Christ.

And after you receive that gift-righteousness, it's followed by gift power--not power that comes from your talents and your wisdom, but power that comes from yielding yourself to the Spirit. All this is available to all those who will simply receive it AS a gift of grace, not a reward for personal awesomeness.

Are you ready to receive Christ's righteousness, if you never have, and then to receive Christ's power and purpose for your life? It's time for you to stop building your own city and give yourself to Jesus to be used by him to build his eternal city.

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