

Nehemiah 7:1-73

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Preacher: Nathan Raynor

[0:00] Nehemiah in a unique position to be trusted by King Artaxerxes as his cupbearer. We have seen King Artaxerxes give permission and a sort of blank check to Nehemiah for the rebuilding of the wall.

Chapter 1, verse 8 says, For the good hand of God was upon Nehemiah. We have seen Nehemiah's return to Jerusalem, his observation of the wall, his report of God's sovereign goodness for the task, and the beginning of the building of the wall.

We have seen the way that the Israelites worked in the face of opposition, for God had given them a mind to work. That's chapter 4, verse 6. And we have seen the work completed, and the surrounding nations afraid because they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of their God.

Chapter 6, verse 16. So the wall has now been finished. But the work is far from over. The building of the wall was just the very beginning of the work that needed to be done in Israel.

Notice here my careful language. As I said to you that God brought the news. That God moved Nehemiah's heart.

[1:19] That God placed Nehemiah in a unique position. We've been talking a lot about providence and the way in which God brings about His purposes.

As I first read chapter 7 this week, I actually had a mind just to skip over it altogether. In fact, I spent the week preparing in that way and looking at chapters 8, 9, and 10 at the spiritual revival that began to come.

But I realized something in my study, and unfortunately, yesterday morning, I realized this and had to start all over again. But it's not that the work began, that there was a work happening during a period of time, these 52 days, and that was the work of rebuilding the wall, and then things changed.

And now it's the spiritual work. And you'll hear many people preach and commentate on this in that way. There was a physical work, and then the spiritual work began.

But in fact, the spiritual work had already begun. The people had already been moved to work. Nehemiah had been moved to lead in this way, not simply for the sake of the building of a wall, but because of God's glory.

[2:32] You remember, I've been telling you all along, the reason Nehemiah was so grieved is that the state of the nation of Israel was the visible manifestation of God's goodness, God's character to His people.

And they were in shambles. They were languishing in the land. And Nehemiah wanted God to be seen as big as God actually is.

Wanted to ascribe to Him the proper glory that is due Him. And that is why this work goes on as it begins. And we see the people not failing in this.

They falter at some times in chapter 4. We see them falter. They think the work's too great for them. But they don't fail. Under Nehemiah's leadership, they continue to build. And it seems like everything is just right.

Pretty rare in Scripture we get that. Glimpse of people doing it all right. And guess what? In this case, there's a failure on their part. I'm going to show you that in chapter 7 and hope that it speaks to your life today.

[3:34] Join me in a word of prayer before we read in chapter 7. Father God, I thank You again for this day and I thank You for Your Word. And I pray that this morning You will bless the preaching of it. The miracle of this is not that I can get up here and say words that make any sense.

It's that You, by Your Spirit, apply them to our hearts. I need this as much as anyone else this morning. And so I pray that You will bless the reading and the preaching of Your Word. I pray this in Christ's name.

Amen. Now, I am not going to read to you all of chapter 7. I would encourage you to take a look at it on your own when you don't have to properly pronounce all of these names.

We're going to make a little bit of a jump and I will go back and I will recap for you the section that we skip in our reading. But let's begin chapter 7, verse 1. Now, when the wall had been built, I had set up the doors and the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed.

I gave my brother Hanani and Hananiah, the governor of the castle, charge over Jerusalem, for he was a more faithful and God-fearing man than many. And I said to them, Let not the gates of Jerusalem be open till the sun is hot.

[4 : 41] And while they are still standing guard, let them shut and bar the doors. Appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, some at their guard posts and some in front of their own homes. The city was wide and large, but the people within it were few and no houses had been rebuilt.

Then my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles and the officials and the people to be enrolled by genealogy. And I found the book of the genealogy of those who came up at the first and I found written in it.

Jump to verse 73. So the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, some of the people, the temple servants, and all Israel lived in their towns.

And when the seventh month had come, the people of Israel were in their towns. I want to draw your attention to two verses. And this kind of arrested my attention as I was really preparing yesterday morning to give you a little brief summary of chapter 7 so we can move on to chapter 8. And that's where I was at. And these two verses caught my attention. Verse 4 and verse 73. The city was wide and large, but the people within it were few and no houses had been rebuilt.

[5 : 46] So the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, some of the people, the temple servants, and all Israel lived in their towns. So what's happening here is that now the wall has been rebuilt.

No one or very few people had lived within Jerusalem because it wasn't a safe place to be and they were in their country homes. They were out in the suburbs living.

And now that the wall has been rebuilt, the houses still haven't been rebuilt, and people are back in their nice suburban places. That's where they are. They're in the comfort of their homes.

And what struck me is that they missed the point altogether. God's glory is not found in buildings, but in His people. And they didn't see that the state of Jerusalem was the real point.

How is it that the people of God are thriving? They did a great work. They built a wall in 52 days and they all headed back to their comfy homes. They didn't come to occupy the city.

[6 : 49] The people of God living in community as the people of God. The same problem existed a number of years later as the temple was being rebuilt. And Haggai, who prophesied during this time, chapter 1, verse 3 and 4, says, Then the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet.

Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies in ruins? And speaking of the temple, is it the proper time for you to be living in your nice homes in the suburbs while this house lies in ruins?

Now, in this day, a paneled house is a very fancy thing. Sam and I are painting our dining room right now, which at one time was paneled and painted and painted and painted and painted and I'm very frustrated because it's so hard to paint a paneled wall with all the little grooves and such in it.

But in this time, it meant that they had lumber. They had paid the high price for wood and they had had it milled and they had placed it along the walls inside their homes. These were nice homes that they were dwelling in.

And we find them here in the same condition. It's as if they completely missed the point. Entirely missed the point of why they were to rebuild Jerusalem.

[8 : 09] A revival comes. We're going to see that beginning next week. Truth. The Word of God is open. They called Ezra and he begins to read from the law and the Spirit of God comes and gives them conviction and we see at the end of this process 8, 9, and 10.

The very beginning of chapter 11 says, Now the leaders of the people lived in Jerusalem and the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while nine out of ten remained in their other towns.

And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem. So recognize that a revival happens and what do they begin to do? They begin to send people back into Jerusalem to live and dwell in a community.

So what does that say to us? I've been saying to you all along that the parallel here is that we're building a spiritual house. It's not such a far stretch.

I kind of missed it myself. I wanted to draw this comparison between the building of a wall to the building of a church. But in fact, what they were really doing was building a community of faith.

[9:13] Those who were gods who worshipped Him. It's the very same thing we're doing today. In John chapter 13, verse 34 and 35, Jesus says, A new commandment I give to you that you love one another.

Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this, all people will know that you are My disciples if you have love for one another. Now the word used here, no, Jesus didn't say this in Greek.

Jesus would have said this in Hebrew more than likely. But the Greek word here for, excuse me, the Hebrew word for new actually means renewed. So we could read it, A renewed commandment I give to you.

A restating of the commandment found in Leviticus 19.18. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. It's the high calling of Christians to love God and to love people.

The commandments that are given to us in this way. And how is it that they're going to know that we're Christians? By our buildings, by our signs, by our radio stations, by our t-shirts, by our bumper stickers, I hope not, but by our love for one another.

[10:26] The Greek word translated here, alēlus, one another, has no singular form. There's no way to say this in the singular, meaning that it is never used in reference to me, but it is always used in reference to us.

It is the very paradigm word for community. That is what we are called to. I fear there's a form of thinking in the Christian church in America that's very radically independent.

There's a little phrase that kind of encapsulates it, although I wouldn't give all the credit to the phrase, but you've heard this, personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Found nowhere in the Scriptures.

Now it's true, we do each have an individual relationship with Jesus Christ. He is my brother. We are friends. He is my Lord. There's a relationship there between me and Him, but the more proper way to speak about it would be to say that I have been saved not to a personal relationship to Jesus Christ, but to a community relationship with Jesus Christ.

We have been saved in order to be together for the glory of God. You cannot miss this point. It's an axiom. Everything swings on this for your Christian living.

[11:43] Your Christian life cannot happen apart from the context of the church. Notice the epistles. All of the letters written, Paul, Peter, John, all of their primary concerns is correcting the community of faith.

They do so doctrinally. They bring truth. Praise God for it. Much of it is commentary, setting us straight about our thinking. But they do so in order that the community of faith will live rightly.

Let's take, for example, 1 Corinthians. Chapters 1-4. Paul addresses the disunity that's happening amongst them because they're dividing over worldly criteria.

chapter 1, verse 16 and 17. Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in you? That's not chapter 1. I don't know what chapter it is. You can find it.

Verses 16 and 17 of one of those chapters. I think it's 3. Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy and you, being the church, are that temple.

[12:56] chapter 5, he addresses concern for immorality that's happening. There's, in fact, a sexual relationship that's happening. And he says in verse 2, let him who has done this be removed from among you.

Chapter 6, lawsuits. There's these lawsuits happening between Christians. And in verse 8, he says, you yourselves wrong and defraud even your own brothers.

Chapter 7-10, he addresses issues of Christian liberty. 10-32, it says, give no offense to Jew or to Greek or the church of God. Just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage but that of many, that they may be saved.

The way we live matters. Chapters 11-14, the worship practices of the Corinthian church. Chapter 14, verse 23, he says, will they not say that you are out of your minds?

It's the major concern of the epistles as how it is that we live together in a community of faith.

Because how we do this, how we live as a community of God's saints will either confirm the gospel realities in our life and attract people to Christ, or it will deny those gospel realities and repel people from Him.

[14:19] This happens far too much in the American church. I can't speak for the rest of the world. From my observation, this happens far too much.

How will people know that we are disciples of Jesus Christ? By our love for one another. How will they see that our religion is a farce? That it is ridiculous?

That it's just a bunch of rules and laws that are going to rob all the temporary fun of this life?

Because we are just like them. Go back to Nehemiah.

Let me sum up for you really fast what happens here in Nehemiah. It begins with, starting in verse 6, a numbering of the human resources.

The people matter. The people that were brought back from exile, they matter. They mean something to the nation of Israel and therefore the glory of God. Verses 6-38, the laymen are numbered.

[15:18] Verses 39-42, the priests are numbered. Verse 43, the Levites are numbered. Verse 44, the Levitical singers are numbered.

Verse 45, the gatekeepers who more than likely were also Levites are numbered. Verse 46-56, the temple servants are numbered. Verses 57-60, the descendants of Solomon's servants are numbered.

And then we see a separating and an excluding in verses 61-65, kind of a sorting. And they exclude those who were unable to prove their descent from Aaron.

Those whose Levitical line was not very clear and clean, which was a way that they were ascribing to the proper order of worship that God had given to them.

We could draw a parallel to the way we pick leadership for our churches in this regard. And then verses 66-72, there's a numbering of the other resources, the other things that are at their disposal for the rebuilding and the goodness of the people.

[16:21] And that's chapter 7. You see why at first glance I might have jumped right over the top of it. But the one anotherness is important and they were missing it.

A revival came amongst them and they got it and they began to get about that work. Now let's talk a little bit about the one another's of Scripture I mentioned to you before. They're in John.

That we are to love one another. You know that the New Testament is full of them? I have a cheat sheet right here in front of me. Highlighted and ready to go. Listen to some of these. This is what we're meant to do together.

Be at peace with one another. Love one another. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.

Honor one another above yourselves. Live in harmony with one another.

Stop passing judgment on one another. Accept one another. Instruct one another. Greet one another with a holy kiss which was to say you're part of our family. Have equal concern for one another.

[17:24] Serve one another in love. Carry each other's burdens. Be patient. Bearing with one another in love. Be kind and compassionate to one another. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

Submit to one another. In humility consider others better than yourselves. Bear with each other.

Forgive one another. Teach one another. Admonish one another.

Make your love increase and overflow for one another. Encourage one another. Build each other up. Spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

Confess your sins to one another. Pray for one another. Love one another deeply from the heart.

Live in harmony with one another. Offer hospitality to one another. Clothe yourselves with humility towards one another.

And once again, love one another. These are the things we're called to as a faith community. You may have hoped that I was at this point going to just give you some opinion of how I think we ought to be living together because it would be really easy to weasel your way out of that.

[18:29] But thus speaks the word of the living God. This is how we're meant to live together for our good and for God's glory. This requires a togetherness.

Do you catch all those things? I love texting. I love it. I don't like the formalities of conversation.

Having a phone conversation. I could skip right over the hellos.

How are you? I could just get right to the point. Texting allows me to do that. It's really hard. I mean, to a degree, some of these things we can accomplish this way. But we need to be together, face to face, spending time in relationship together to do these things.

Community is incredibly important. Beloved, Sunday morning is not enough. Especially those of you who come right when we start and leave right when we end.

That's just consumer Christianity. You're coming for the show. You sit, you consume, you leave. We need you as much as you need us. We need relationship.

[19:38] We need to spend time beforehand drinking coffee and talking about our weeks. We need to spend time afterward encouraging one another with the preaching of the word and the singing of our songs. Those things matter.

The service itself is important. You know the reason we don't turn the music up super, super, super loud and turn off all the lights in here? Because we need to hear each other singing true words.

If you're not a singer, start. I know it's terrifying. I have a horrible singing voice. I can hear a key at least. I think I sing the right notes. I think I sing the right notes.

But it doesn't matter when you sing, think. The person in front of me and the person next to me needs to be encouraged with the truth of the gospel. I will sing. Find your heart uniting with the words coming out of your mouth.

That's why we do that. If you ever come to a concert here, it'll be much louder. You won't be able to hear yourself think we're going to turn the music up so loud. But there's a reason we do it that way.

[20:37] Across the nation this morning, there are dark rooms and people having these little silent moments with God. Stay home if that's what you want to do. We come together to meet with the people of God, to encourage one another, to do all these things that I just listed off.

life. It matters. It's so, so important. Other times during the week, if you are just coming on Sunday morning to Christ Family Church, you're missing a huge part of what church life looks like.

We do something called community groups. Right now they meet on Wednesdays. They don't have to. There are two places they meet right now. They can meet in many, many, many places.

Community groups are key and vital to what we do.

It lets us get together and really start working these things out together, really pressing into Christian life together. It's hugely important. Now look, some of these people probably lived in their fancy homes out in the suburbs and they said, Nehemiah, we can't come live in the city.

There aren't any houses yet. The houses haven't even been built. So when you get a whole city built for us, we'll come back and we'll stay. In the city, right? Make sure you build me a paneled house because I've got a nice paneled house out where I'm at right now.

[21:59] They didn't do that after revival came. Chapter 11, they went back and they worked and they built. It takes that. It takes work to get together. Just because you show up to a small little Bible study and you don't get a lot out of it, doesn't mean you shouldn't go again.

It takes work. You have to contribute. It might be a mess. It might be a total shambles. Maybe you're the one that needs to step in and say, this is a mess. How can we help sort this out together? It's very possible. It takes investment to live the Christian life together. How many of you have said, don't raise your hands, please? I don't certainly get anything out of that.

What did you put in? Did you contribute in any way whatsoever before you made that very comment? I would guess not. These things take work.

It's hard to get to places, right? Parents, I understand. I didn't used to understand. I get it. I get it now. It's hard to get them up. Sam was mentioning this morning that there's got to be some spiritual warfare on a house on Sunday mornings because nothing goes well on Sunday mornings.

[23:09] Our boys wake up at a quarter till seven almost every day. It's annoying. We want one day, a day off. We sleep in just a little bit, 7.30, come on. But Sunday morning, we have to wake them up almost every Sunday morning.

They sleep so well. Wrestle to get them here, right? It's hard to go to community group with kids. I get that. It's conveniently been at our house, which makes it a little bit easier as of late, right? But it's challenging to do that. We have to work at these things. It's very, very important. If you're a member of this church, let's find a way to get you involved in a community group. Come to me and talk to me. What are the problems? What are the things that are keeping it from happening? I understand that we have distance issues. We have health issues. Come talk to me. Let's find a way to get you involved in this kind of life. Let me remind you that if you're a member of this church, you signed a covenant with this church, a commitment to be together with us. The preamble says, having been led by the Spirit of God to acknowledge Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and in profession of that faith, I most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with Christ's family church.

[24 : 20] And there are seven statements that list it off here. And the second to the last one says, to contribute to the work of the church with my talents, time, and finances. Are you doing that?

There's probably a number of people in this church that need a dose of church discipline because you're not. You're breaking the covenant because you don't give of yourself. The closing paragraph says, I enter into this covenant together with Christ's family church under the common goal of obedience to, glorification of, and joyful satisfaction in Jesus Christ because I believe and assert with the rest of the body that we need one another's help to do so.

We were created for community. You're spiritually depressed? Get with the beloved. You're struggling to walk out your faith?

Get with the beloved. Don't just go when you feel strong and ready to contribute. Go when you're hurting. That is the place you need to be. It's with those who understand what you're going through and want to see you be healthy.

These things matter. I listened to a sermon this week where the guy was sharing his shock at some of the things that are happening in our Christian culture.

[25 : 39] The way now you can watch TV on the web, which is not really a new thing because they've been doing it on TV. Excuse me. TV on the web. Sermons. Church sermons. Church services on the web.

Right? It's been happening on TV for a long, long time. But he was talking about this phenomenon and he said, you'll never believe there is a church in Atlanta where they project a holographic image of the pastor onto the stage.

And I thought, oh gosh, I know exactly what he's talking about. That is in our backyard. And I won't say the name of the church, but I think you know what we're discussing here. He was just in shock about it.

He just couldn't believe that these things were happening. And he brought up the doctrine of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. And I really, really appreciated that and spent a lot of time thinking about it this week.

Jesus Christ came, God sent his son to the earth in human form. He came and he dwelt amongst us.

[26 : 41] Right? Physically dwelt. Now I believe that God did that at the perfect time in history. Right? Perfectly sent him right when he needed to be sent. Maybe if he had waited, he could have been a little more efficient.

Right? Could have sent him during this time. We could have simulcasted Jesus all over the world. How phenomenal that would have been. Maybe the reason he didn't send him at this time was so that no one could simulcast him.

So that it was impossible for some guy with a web phone to hold it up and try to get him up on the internet so that everyone could hear the man Jesus Christ speak.

Right? I think it's important that we take that and we apply that. That physical presence is crucial. Jesus came to dwell amongst us. Do we dwell with each other?

I'm thankful that you're here this morning. I think for a lot of you, you get this. Like many of you do. And I would just encourage you to let this stiffen your backbone. Put a rod of steel in there and don't bend from it.

[27 : 43] Some of you don't. I love you and that's why I'm telling you. Some of you don't get it. Some of you need to spend time seriously considering how to work your week out so you can be with the people of God.

How we function together and how we live in this community of faith matters to the world. I want people to see Christ Family Church. I don't want them to know us for the style of music we have or that we do verse by verse exposition.

We're a reformed church. We're the church that meets on 60 and you can't see the building from the road. I don't want to be known for those things. I want to be known for our love. When people ask me what I do for a living and I say I pastor a church and they say what church do you pastor and I say Christ Family Church I want all over this community for them to go ah your people love each other.

Wouldn't that be nice? Be nice. But what a great grace of God that would be to us for that to happen. Now I have to ask you the question as we talk about some of these technology things and why it's important to be together.

Can you use technology? Is it an amazing tool? Yes please do. I told you that I was listening to a sermon online that even got my mind going about the doctrine of the incarnation of Jesus Christ and how it applies to the way we do church.

[28 : 59] It's a valuable tool. It's neat. You ought to get out there and listen to sermons. There are some good preachers out there. Don't let them jade your opinion of me. There's some very very good preaching at your fingertips.

On your cell phone it's so incredibly cool. But what is we have to ask the question. What is the difference between just a mere fellowship and a church?

Young people especially you. As you get out of going to church with your parents and you come away to college and you begin to question everything. Why can't you just have a Bible study on your dorm hall?

Isn't that enough? Right? You're encouraging one another. You're doing a lot of these things that I mentioned. You're studying the word. You're devoting yourself to it. You're praying together. Those are good things, right? Why can it not just stop at that?

Why do you need to be part of a church? Because there are some distinct differences. Firstly, a church has qualified leadership. It's important. Qualified leadership. We saw the separation that happened in Nehemiah chapter 7.

[29 : 59] There's the practice of the ordinances. Baptism. The Lord's Supper which we'll take here in a moment. Those are an important aspect of what a church does together which are ultimately about church discipline.

Something that happens. I would encourage you to not practice church discipline amongst a fellowship. Continue to encourage. Continue to teach. Do those types of things. In the church setting though, we must call people out when they're living in habitual sin.

To our application today, the third thing is diversity. It's a beautiful thing about this church. I have discovered now that I'm being quoted for one of the things that I never would have wanted to be quoted for.

But apparently a lot of the college students tell each other as I have told them numerous times. If you always hang out with your idiot friend you'll always be an idiot. I put myself in that category. If I'm always hanging out with people that are my age and sharing my same experiences, I'll never grow. I need people that have gone before me. And I need to be passing information down to those who are behind me.

[31 : 00] These are important things for us to be doing. Diversity in a church should happen. If we are preaching Christ, Christ draws men to himself.

And there are going to be men and women of different ages and different colors. That's an important thing for us to do. Now granted, we have a church in an area and that area is going to tend to have a certain demographic.

But we do not have a Saddleback Sam. If you're familiar with the Purpose Driven Church. They had a target person. This person looks like this and we're going to arrange everything we do to get this person to come to here.

income, likes, dislikes, all of those things. That's who we're going to go after. Right? I love some of the motivation behind some of the like fringy churches.

Right? But they're wrong. Biker churches? We're going to minister to motorcycle guys. No. We all have a common demographic that we're trying to minister to and that's lost people.

[32 : 02] Right? That's people in need of grace. That's who we're meant to minister to. Right? I heard recently that a girl who had attended here for a while decided not to come any longer

because our music time wasn't charismatic enough for her.

She grew up in a much more charismatic church and she wanted to go someplace else and that's okay. Right? But what I want you to see is that we didn't exclude her from our meeting because of the way we do music. Right?

We didn't do music for people who really have a hard time swaying at all. Right? That's you guys. The clapping is like, right? Clapping and singing is tough for our group. Right?

That's not what we're trying to accomplish. We didn't write that down on our list. Non-rhythmic people. It wasn't what we were looking for. Right? You guys want to get super happy in here? You go right ahead and do it. Right? We just want to minister to people who need grace. That's what we're here for. In Acts chapter 4 we see Peter before the council.

[33 : 03] Jerusalem verses 11 and 12 says, This Jesus is the stone that was projected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

This is our Jesus Christ. The one who draws men to himself. And he uses the church to do that. This fellowship of Christian faith.

this community. So I'd ask you this morning to examine your hearts. Are you playing your part in this community? Right?

The analogy is used that we're a body. What part of the body are you? And is it dysfunctional? Is it non-existent? Does it just not even show up to some of the things that it's necessary at?

Ask God to search your heart. Let's pray together. Amen.