

The Work of the Christian Pt 2

Books of Ezra and Nehemiah

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to the third chapter of Nehemiah, Nehemiah 3. We're continuing a message we began the topic last week, this particular chapter, and we entitled the message last week and this week the same title, "The Work of the Christian." The work of the Christian, so this is part 2 from Nehemiah 3. We noted last time that we are created for work, that God made man to work. He worked before the fall. Work is not a product of sin, it is what we were created for and in this particular passage we learned something about the essential work that every Christian is called to do because we have in this passage an incredibly detailed description of the work of the people of God in building the walls of Jerusalem, and in that we see that the Lord is telling us and showing us that the work of the Christian now, how does this relate to us. In the same way they were building walls to separate Jerusalem from their enemies, from the oppression of those who would undo the work they were trying to do that would hinder their worship, they were separating themselves from the practices of the wicked and ungodly people around them, this was part of what's going on. We've seen how that brackets really the whole building of the walls in Nehemiah, the last couple chapters of Ezra, remember these books are one book, Ezra-Nehemiah, and the last couple of chapters of Ezra are about separation, then you build the walls and then the end of Nehemiah is about separation again, the need to be separate and distinct, and what we've seen is that really the building of the walls of Nehemiah is a picture of our calling to build the walls in our lives and that is the way we do that is in pursuing holiness. The passage relates to our lives in calling us to pursue practical personal holiness and to pursue corporate holiness that we might be different and distinct; that we might not just be separated from the world, yes, that's part of it but separated unto God that our lives might be lived for his glory. That is the calling of the Christian. That is the essential calling. If you are a person who names the name of Jesus Christ, you are called to be holy, "Be holy for I am holy." This is God's intention for you and for me, that we become increasingly like his Son, that we become increasingly righteous in our lives. This is not an easy calling as it was not an easy calling for the people to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

So in the third chapter we've noted we have an extraordinarily detailed account of the people and places involved in the building of the wall. This chapter is an accounting of all the people that were instrumental in making this happen. We noted 39 people last time are listed, their names recorded in Holy Scripture for all eternity, the great value God

places on this work, and I really count 38 places or 38 geographical details. So there's this who and where is really laid out for us and for the original audience when this was given and what's up with all of that detail? I think it has much to tell us. It's not just the people and the places but 35 times you have the word "repaired" or "made repairs, carried out repairs." The word means "to seize and take hold of." And so you have each person listed is seizing and taking hold of the work. So this is the work they were called to do and we're learning the work that we are called to do to seize and take hold of the work. The Christian life is not a passive thing, it is an active reality. We actively pursue holiness. In fact, Hebrews 12:14 says pursue peace and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. That is that if you are not pursuing holiness, if that's not a part of your life, if that's not a burden of your life, you need to question whether or not you have really been born again; that though we're not saved by our works, we're not saved because we're holy, no, we are unholy, we are unfit, we are completely unable to do the will of God, but when we come to Christ, he gives us a new heart, he gives us a new disposition and he gives us a new calling and that calling is to become like Jesus. So we're called to this work. The work of the Christian.

We're going to read the text again and I want you to listen for those details, listen for the geographical pictures that he seems to be painting in the minds of the original readers would have understood this, they would have been familiar with all of the locations, many of the names, and so it would have captured for them or caught them up really in seeing it as well as hearing it. Chapter 3 of Nehemiah.

1 Then Eliashib the high priest arose with his brothers the priests and built the Sheep Gate; they consecrated it and hung its doors. They consecrated the wall to the Tower of the Hundred and the Tower of Hananel. 2 Next to him the men of Jericho built, and next to them Zaccur the son of Imri built. 3 Now the sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate; they laid its beams and hung its doors with its bolts and bars. 4 Next to them Meremoth the son of Uriah the son of Hakkoz made repairs. And next to him Meshullam the son of Berechiah the son of Meshezabel made repairs. And next to him Zadok the son of Baana also made repairs. 5 Moreover, next to him the Tekoites made repairs, but their nobles did not support the work of their masters. 6 Joiada the son of Paseah and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah repaired the Old Gate; they laid its beams and hung its doors with its bolts and its bars. 7 Next to them Melatiah the Gibeonite and Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon and of Mizpah, also made repairs for the official seat of the governor of the province beyond the River. 8 Next to him Uzziel the son of Harhaiah of the goldsmiths made repairs. And next to him Hananiah, one of the perfumers, made repairs, and they restored Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall. 9 Next to them Rephaiah the son of Hur, the official of half the district of Jerusalem, made repairs. 10 Next to them Jedaiah the son of Harumaph made repairs opposite his house. And next to him Hattush the son of Hashabneiah made repairs. 11 Malchijah the son of Harim and Hasshub the son of Pahath-moab repaired another section and the Tower of Furnaces. 12 Next to him Shallum the son of

Hallohesh, the official of half the district of Jerusalem, made repairs, he and his daughters. 13 Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the Valley Gate. They built it and hung its doors with its bolts and its bars, and a thousand cubits of the wall to the Refuse Gate. 14 Malchijah the son of Rechab, the official of the district of Beth-haccherem repaired the Refuse Gate. He built it and hung its doors with its bolts and its bars. 15 Shallum the son of Col-hozeh, the official of the district of Mizpah, repaired the Fountain Gate. He built it, covered it and hung its doors with its bolts and its bars, and the wall of the Pool of Shelah at the king's garden as far as the steps that descend from the city of David. 16 After him Nehemiah the son of Azbuk, official of half the district of Beth-zur, made repairs as far as a point opposite the tombs of David, and as far as the artificial pool and the house of the mighty men. 17 After him the Levites carried out repairs under Rehum the son of Bani. Next to him Hashabiah, the official of half the district of Keilah, carried out repairs for his district. 18 After him their brothers carried out repairs under Bavvai the son of Henadad, official of the other half of the district of Keilah. 19 Next to him Ezer the son of Jeshua, the official of Mizpah, repaired another section in front of the ascent of the armory at the Angle. 20 After him Baruch the son of Zabbai zealously repaired another section, from the Angle to the doorway of the house of Eliashib the high priest. 21 After him Meremoth the son of Uriah the son of Hakkoz repaired another section, from the doorway of Eliashib's house even as far as the end of his house. 22 After him the priests, the men of the valley, carried out repairs. 23 After them Benjamin and Hasshub carried out repairs in front of their house. After them Azariah the son of Maaseiah, son of Ananiah, carried out repairs beside his house. 24 After him Binnui the son of Henadad repaired another section, from the house of Azariah as far as the Angle and as far as the corner. 25 Palal the son of Uzai made repairs in front of the Angle and the tower projecting from the upper house of the king, which is by the court of the guard. After him Pedaiah the son of Parosh made repairs. 26 The temple servants living in Ophel made repairs as far as the front of the Water Gate toward the east and the projecting tower. 27 After them the Tekoites repaired another section in front of the great projecting tower and as far as the wall of Ophel. 28 Above the Horse Gate the priests carried out repairs, each in front of his house. 29 After them Zadok the son of Immer carried out repairs in front of his house. And after him Shemaiah the son of Shecaniah, the keeper of the East Gate, carried out repairs. 30 After him Hananiah the son of Shelemiah, and Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph, repaired another section. After him Meshullam the son of Berechiah carried out repairs in front of his own quarters. 31 After him Malchijah, one of the goldsmiths, carried out repairs as far as the house of the temple servants and of the merchants, in front of the Inspection Gate and as far as the upper room of the corner. 32 Between the upper room of the corner and the Sheep Gate the goldsmiths and the merchants carried out repairs.

Isn't it amazing this repetition you hear as you're reading that, so many phrases over and over and over again. I mean it could have been written, "Here's a list of the guys and they carried out repairs and they fixed the gates and they made the bolts and all that." One time, "Here's the list." But he wants you not only to hear all those names recorded for all history, he wants you to hear the work being done. Did you hear things like the gates, they laid the beams, they fixed the bolts and the bars. Over and over you hear that and hearing in the word "repairs, carried out repairs," the same Hebrew word means they grasped, they seized the work and he wants you to hear over and over and over not just the names but that every single person took the work, they grasped the work, they began the work, and all of this was very important work. And then in even describing as I mentioned last time, he basically takes you on a tour around the city walls of Jerusalem. He starts in the northwest corner at the Sheep Gate. This is where the sacrificial offerings would be brought in. They'd bring the sheep in to offer the sacrifices especially at Passover. This is the gate, it's right beside the temple. And he tells us about the construction and he takes us around all 10 of the gates of Jerusalem finally coming back, the 11th reference to the gate is the Sheep Gate again. He's taken us all the way around the perimeter of Jerusalem and for those that were hearing it, they would have understood and been able to even in their own mind's eye seen it. For us it's a little more elusive and difficult that we have to labor to hear what God wanted us to hear.

So let's pray the Lord will help us now as we consider the work of the Christian and rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, pursuing holiness, separation from the world. Let's pray together.

Our Father, we thank You for Your word, we thank You that all Scripture is God-breathed and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction and training in righteousness that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped, furnished for every good work. So this passage speaks to us and gives us something distinctive that we need. We ask You, Lord, to speak to us through it that Your servants might be obedient to You, that we might walk in the fullness of the Spirit and the power of Christ through the glory of the Gospel, but that we might truly be holy. And we pray this in Jesus' name and for His glory. Amen.

So we started looking at the work of the Christian last week and we looked at the first three points last week, so I really encourage you if you weren't here or you didn't see that, to watch that but essentially we saw three points. I'll hit them really quickly just to remind us now these next three points. We have three points today that will be 4, 5 and 6, so I'm gonna try to say, I think I'm gonna say 1, 2 and 3. It makes me more confused to start off with 4, 5 and 6. I know sometimes I'll do that. I'm trying to keep you on your toes. "What's he gonna do today with his other points?" Anyway, forget that. But six points total.

What we saw last time was that we talked about the work of the Christian and what can we learn about the work of the Christian from this passage? What is God instructing us from this passage? We saw that it's urgent work, that they get right to the work, and the

way the passage unfolds from chapter 2 into chapter 3 gives the force of they set right to work. Once you see the work to be done, once you see areas of your life that are not like they need to be, there is sin welling up in an area, you now become aware of an area that needs to be dealt with, it needs to be brought under to obedience of Christ, get right to work. It's urgent work. Secondly, it's not just urgent work, it's everyone's work. We noted how all of these names, all of these people, all of these different types of people, none of them were listed as, you know, stone masons or stone cutters or carpenters but they all had to be involved in the work because all Christians are called to be holy, not just the pastors or the elders or the Bible teachers, no, or the deacons, all Christians are called to be holy. All Christians are called to engage in the work of pursuing personal holiness and helping every other believer pursue holiness. That's the building of the walls of Jerusalem.

So it's everyone's work. It's also a holy work. It's precious to God. We saw that it starts off in chapter 3, the first people he lists are Elijah the high priest with his brothers the priests, and they consecrated the wall, they consecrated the Sheep Gate, and we saw that word means to make holy, to set apart, to sanctify, and I think Nehemiah in recording this records that part for us first because that was, in a sense, consecrating the entire project. It was saying this whole work is holy unto God. This is something God treasures and values. This is why he's given us all these names that we have to read in 2020 as someone, you know, in America trying to read all those crazy names, right? I think I was a little better than last time, just a little. Maybe if we do it, I'll just read it every week. Let's just do that and maybe in six or eight weeks I'll have it down. No, Lord willing is the last time we're gonna read chapter 3 this time through Nehemiah. But the issue is it's holy work.

Now we come to today, point 4 or point 1, this is the fourth in the overall total but our first point today. It's not just urgent, everyone's work, holy work, it is a distinctive work. A distinctive work and what I mean by that is it's varied, it's unique. There's a sense in which it's every person's work is different from every other one. I think one of the reasons he took us around the city was to note who was building what parts of the wall and the people who would have known that would have been able to know, they would have known the geography, the topography of Jerusalem. You know, one guy covers a thousand cubits, that's 1,500 feet, 500 yards. I mean, he was the, in one sense you would think he's the most valuable worker possibly. He was, you know, he was on the list of the ballot for most valuable when they did that. No, but he's recorded as really being effective but probably part of the reason he was able to do that was because he was on the flat part of the city.

When you actually watch how long it takes, I sort of did this, you know, how many yards per verse and I'm not gonna bore you with the extra details. Some of you guys, if you want to talk to me afterwards we can have a conversation about that. Most people probably don't care that much about it except to say this, the general principle. They cover a lot more ground in the first 15 verses than they do in the next 12, and why is that? Because the next 12 verses, after you get to the bottom of the city, this starts with the Sheep Gate, works around to the Refuse Gate and the Fountain Gate at the bottom of the

city, the south side. From the Fountain Gate to the Water Gate is like 12 verses, just this section. It's actually a distance of about 200 yards and it's about the same number of people roughly that were involved in the first distance, not quite, 80% of the number of people are listed that are listed in the first group. The first group is 9/10 of a mile. The city itself is about a mile and a half around so almost 2/3 of it is done in the first part of it and then you have this slowed down part where all these guys are working on a 200 yard section and then it kind of picks up again as you read to the end. What was it? That was the area where the Jerusalem falls off into the Kidron Valley in a steep descent, and so the work there was extra-laborious, probably much more difficult to haul the materials up and down as they're trying to remove debris that's no longer fit to use and as they're bringing in supplies and materials.

So it just tells us that, you know, each part was different. It was difficult. And the other thing that's interesting as you read through the passage, there are so many things that are repaired, I mean repeated over and over and over again. The word "repair" 35 times, or "made repairs, carried out repairs, repaired." Actually the Hebrew word 35 times, the same word. The NASB changes it up because I think they got a little bored of saying "repaired, repaired, repaired." I wish they'd said "repaired, repaired, repaired." I think it's better to just say it, just let it be that way where you ask the question, "Wow, why did God say this word over and over and over again?" Because he wanted us to hear it over and over and over again, and remember that means to seize, to grasp, pick up the work. The idea is the initiation of the work. They arose and they build and he tells us each one and they got up and they started to the work and that's so important.

But another word, phrase that's repeated over and over again is the phrase "in front of." The Hebrew word occurs 11 times, twice it's translated "opposite" in the New American Standard which I'm reading from. Nine times "in front of." And so it's talking about a distinctive work that we're called to do. Each of us are called to do unique things, we're called, we deal with unique challenges, different circumstances, different sin patterns, different temptations, different life experience, different stumbling blocks that you have in your life, different adjustments that you must make, completely different struggles and sins. Some of you struggle with this and some of you struggle with that and the idea is whatever you find in front of you, get to work on that.

I said nine times "in front of," look with me at verse 23, "After them Benjamin and Hasshub carried out repairs in front of their house. After them Azariah the son of Maaseiah, son of Ananiah, carried out repairs beside his house." Verse 28, "Above the Horse Gate the priests carried out repairs, each in front of his house." Verse 29, "After them Zadok the son of Immer carried out repairs in front of his house." Verse 30, "Hananiah the son of Shelemiah, and Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph, repaired another section. After him Meshullam the son of Berechiah carried out repairs in front of his own quarters." This Hebrew word means translated "in front of" or "opposite" throughout the passage and like I said it occurs 11 times total, pictures that which is conspicuous. It comes from a word which means "to lift up or elevate; to make it high in someone's priority list right before their eyes." Actually interestingly enough that's the word translated "suitable" in Genesis 2, a helper suitable. Suitable is this particular word, the

same Hebrew word, and so the idea is what God does is he takes something and he puts it conspicuous, right in front of you. Help, you need help, this is back to Adam and Eve, right? You need a helper suitable. You need help from on high to fulfill what you're called to do. Husband, you need help that is suitable to you and God puts it right before your eyes. That's what he did with Adam. And you need to understand that that help is right there. You need it.

Well, this is the same idea, in front of or opposite, and so you think about these guys, they come out of their house every day, you know, they're drinking their coffee walking out on their front porch, getting the newspaper. That used to happen, right? Now you get your coffee and you look on the internet, the email, right? But anyway so in the old days they had to come outside and get their newspaper on the front porch and they're looking at, they look out into, they have a really good view because the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and it's rubble. They can see out there but they're seeing a mess. It's there every day and so right there what's conspicuous they're to work on, so we see a number of these names that are recorded, they did that which was right in front of their house.

So the Lord wants you and me, first of all, to understand that we have unique challenges because of the topography of our lives is different, and it does no good for you to compare the topography of your life with somebody else's, to wish that you didn't have to struggle with the things you have to struggle with, you wish you could have someone else's life. First of all, you don't know what their struggles really are so you're arguing from ignorance. That's always a bad thing to do. But secondly, you and I, we are not our own. We don't get to call the shots of what our lives are. We didn't make ourselves and we didn't redeem ourselves. We belong, we're doubly belonging to God. We belong to God as his creation he created for himself, and we belong to him as the one who has been bought back with the blood of Jesus and he lays out our good works before us. He sets the course. We have no say in the matter so don't sit around fretting about, "I wish I didn't have to walk this path," because what you're doing is you're complaining against God. When you resent your circumstances, you resent your challenges, you resent even your weaknesses, you resent the fact that maybe your parents because I think this is true, one of the ways that we see the struggles is we tend to have some of the same struggles that our parents might have had. Maybe your parent was an alcoholic or struggled with drug use and you find that temptation or to escapism and you've learned escape a different way, and you wish that you hadn't seen that modeled and maybe you got some of that through your DNA. I think it comes both ways, but either way there is no excuse for sin, but rather than resent the fact that you've been given that, trust in the sovereignty of God in laying out a course for you to walk in, and the sooner you accept that, the quicker you can get to work with that which is right in front of you, and if you're gonna sit and resent that, you're not gonna be doing any good in the building of the wall of Jerusalem in your life. You're not gonna pursue holiness. You're not going to magnify Christ. You're not going to be any good to those around you. We have to ask and it's hard, I know. We thought we can find ourselves suddenly in circumstances we didn't bargain for, right? Tragedy strikes, it happens and then there we are, all of our plans and we were walking with the Lord, things were going well, we weren't off sinning and walking away from him and suddenly everything changes and the question is still the same, God has put

before you the work to do, will you do it? We must say yes, and the good news is that if he puts the work before you, he will give you the grace to do it. He is, in fact, with you, standing with you in every moment.

So we all have distinctive work. This means that we shouldn't resent our own but we also shouldn't resent what other people have to do. There's a subtle temptation that it's not that uncommon, that we can get discouraged as we look at something else that somebody else is having to go through, and we think it's not fair that they have to go through all of this and this, and we actually have that attitude in our hearts and we become like Simon Peter to Jesus in talking to them, we become one, a voice of Satan to them. "Yeah, you really should be discouraged. I can't believe all these bad things are happening to you." And we start talking like that and if they are discerning what's really going on, we shouldn't be surprised if they say to me or to you, "Get thee behind me, Satan."

Now remember, remember how easy that is to happen. You remember when that happened? Jesus had asked the disciples, "Who do men say that I am?" And Simon Peter said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus said, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, Simon son of Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but My Father which is in heaven, and I say you shall be called Peter and upon you I'm gonna build this, upon this proclamation I'm gonna build My church." The shining moment for Peter, he's leading the disciples, the next section right after that says Jesus began to teach them that he was going to suffer and die at the hands of sinners. Peter takes him aside and says, "Lord, these things shall not happen to You." It says he rebuked Jesus and said, "These things shall certainly not happen to You," and that's when Jesus says to Peter, "Get thee behind Me, Satan." Same guy. One moment and he's saved, he's just now listening to the thoughts of the world, buying into the lie of Satan himself, and therefore vocalizing that to Jesus and Jesus just bluntly hits him right between the eyes where he needed to be and basically saying, "Repent." And Jesus says in his humanity did not need that. He needed, he's wrestling with obedience. It's not an easy thing to be the God-man. We think it is sometimes but it's not. He was dealing with that temptation every moment of every day. He was always winning but he didn't need Peter, one of his closest friends tripping him up.

So don't argue against the distinctive work God has called you to do or the distinctive work he's called others to do. Instead if we can look at it and say, "Lord, You've called me to this. You've ordered my path. You will walk with me." That's the beginning of victory and if we can do that for one another and say, "I know this is hard," and we can mourn with them, we can weep with them, it doesn't mean we don't care, it doesn't mean we don't have a heart, it doesn't mean we don't understand, "This must be incredibly difficult but the Lord is with you and He's gonna walk with us and I'm gonna walk with you and we're not gonna resent it. I'm gonna walk with you together and I'm gonna help you hold up your arms like they did for Moses, and you help me when I need mine held up." It's a distinctive work.

Secondly, it's not just a distinctive work, it's an essential work. An essential work. Building city walls and repairing city gates are essential to the security of the city and

like I said, the repetition of the bolts and the bars, the bolts and the bars, the bolts and the bars, laid beams, you get the idea they were building a really strong wall. They weren't just throwing up a cardboard shanty. They were building it because it needed to be secure because you need to have security from your enemies who would come in and oppress you. A city without gates is defenseless. A city without walls is not a city. And so if in our lives we're not working to build the walls and strengthen the gates, then we are just overrun by sin and by the world and by the devil and there's no distinction in our lives.

So this is essential work. You can't be a Christian and not be laboring for holiness. Now you can be a Christian and forget to be laboring for holiness, you can be a Christian and be laboring for it the wrong way, you can be a Christian and sometimes want to not think about the fact that you're called to labor for holiness, but if you're really a Christian at some point you're gonna wake up to the fact that you're called to be holy. It is essential. I said earlier without holiness no one will see the Lord, Hebrews 12:14. There must be growth in grace. It doesn't mean it's a perfect straight line. No, it's like this but there's movement toward Christ-likeness in the Christian life over time. There can be times where there are dips, right, you're going the wrong way but over time this is, the movement is like that.

And there's another phrase that's repeated, a couple actually that are repeated over and over again that I think add to this. It's an essential work. Think about it, we have to pursue holiness but we all have to pursue holiness. Think about, he labors at going all the way around the city, right? And a key phrase that's repeated in the New American Standard over and over is the phrase "next to him, next to them." It occurs 15 times. Another 16 times it says, "after him" or "after them." So it's like you see this, first of all, let's see in verse 2. "They consecrated the wall to the Tower of the Hundred and the Tower of Hananel. Next to him the men of Jericho built, and next to them Zaccur the son of Imri built." And you'll have that again and again. Verse 4, "Next to them Meremoth the son of Uriah the son of Hakkoz made repairs. And next to him Meshullam the son of Berechiah the son of Meshezabel made repairs. And next to him Zadok." You see that "next to him, next to him, next to him." The phrase "next to him" is translating a Hebrew word, it's an idiom but it literally means "at his hand." That's what the Hebrew actually says. So it says that Eliashib and his brothers are building the gate and the Tower of the Hundred and the tower of Hananel. At his hand Hassenaah built. At his hand Meremoth built. At his hand Meshullam built. At his hand the Tekoites made repairs. At his hand. At his hand. At his hand. The idea is, I mean, at your hand means beside, means next to. It means right beside though, doesn't it?

So the idea is there's no place in the wall that's not being repaired. Every part of the wall. Think about it if they had just said, "You know, you guys work in that general area, y'all work in that area, y'all work in that area," and they build these big beautiful walls and yet there are these huge gaps and they're just sitting there and they're like thrilled, "Hey, it's done," but there's just, you know, you could drive a truck through holes in the wall. That's not good. The whole wall's gotta be built.

Now what does this mean for us? It means that if you're not building, you're not just affecting yourself. If you're not pursuing holiness in your life, you're not just making your own life more miserable because the Bible does say that the way of the transgressor is hard, you're making your own life more miserable but you're not just affecting you. If I'm not pursuing holiness, I'm not just messing up my life and even just my family. If I'm not pursuing holiness, I'm impacting negatively the entire body of Christ. This is the way God sees it. It's very difficult for Americans to think this way because we think so individualistically but the Bible doesn't see it that way. We are part of, think of all the metaphors in the New Testament, we're part of a body. You know, does it matter what happens to this finger to the rest of the body? Yes, the rest of the body cares about that. If this finger gets slammed in a door, my whole body is gonna have an interest in that. How, then, can we think that our, an infection in our souls is not infecting everybody else, affecting everyone else? In reality it is.

So what this says is at his hand, at his hand, at his hand. I need to build, I need to do what God has put right in front of me, I need to walk the path that he's called me to walk, to fight against sin, to fight for holiness through the power of Christ, and I need you to do the same thing right beside me. And we need to encourage each other as we do it, and sometimes we're gonna have to come over and I'm gonna come over to help you build, and sometimes you're gonna come over to help me build. I need you to build and you need me to build.

The Bible gives us different images of this. One really powerful metaphor is found in 1 Corinthians 5:6 where Paul says a little leaven leavens the whole lump. He's talking about the sin of the professed Christian at Corinth who is living with his father's wife and he says to the Corinthians, "You are basically tolerating him and you're proud." That is, they were acting like they were so gracious that they could let a man who was in open sin, open unrepentant sin like that continue to come to church without any, you know, negative feelings, negative expression, you know, exhortations to repent. "No, we just, we're just so gracious and tolerant." And Paul says, "You guys aren't seeing it right at all. No. What you're not understanding is a man who can live like that, even Gentiles don't do that. Even unbelievers don't do that and for a man who says he knows Christ to be doing that, the likelihood is he doesn't know Christ and by acting the way you're acting, you're greasing the skids on his way to hell. That's what you're doing and you're proud about it." No, if you see it correctly, no, this man, he needs to be called to repentance. He needs to be called back to Christ and he says, "Listen, it's not just his, it's huge what's happening for him and his eternal soul is at stake," and he tells them, "Deliver him to Satan for the destruction of his flesh. Turn him over. Put him out of the church spiritually. Let him know he's an unbeliever and in doing that you remove the protection of the church and now Satan is able to attack him more." And he says this, "So that his body might be destroyed but his soul might be saved." It appears in 2 Corinthians that this brother came back and repented. It took that kind of action. That's church discipline. It's done in love. It's not done punitively. We're all sinners, we're all weak. We only know what we know but God has given us a certain clear path that if someone's acting like an unbeliever, they won't repent when they're reproved by a brother, then they won't repent when they're reproved by two or three brothers, and they won't repent when the church calls out to

them, if they won't listen to even the church, you treat them as a pagan or a tax collector, Matthew 18:15-18. Treat them as a pagan or tax collector. Treat them as someone who needs to be saved because if someone can reject, and as you read that in context, he basically is saying that when two or three go to a wayward believer, where two or three go to them and speak to them, Jesus is right there in their midst and what that wayward believer is doing is saying no directly into the face of Christ, and the implication then is drawn then is a believer, it's questionable if a true believer could ever do that, so you should treat them as someone who needs to be saved.

So church discipline is a loving thing and it's Jesus, the shepherd, going after the sheep. Look at that passage, Matthew 18:12-14 sets it up. A sheep is lost and a shepherd goes after him and so Jesus is saying, "When one of My sheep gets lost, I go after them and I use this means to bring them back." Church discipline of imperfect people who just love enough to go speak the truth in love. That's what we're called to do. So Paul's doing the same thing. He says, "Listen, this guy is of tremendous, his soul is of tremendous value. Do everything you can to reclaim it. You have to put him out to reclaim it but do it." But it's not just that, there's another thing at stake, that's what a little leaven leavens the whole lump. What he's saying is there is a polluting impact of this unresolved sin on the rest of the body of Christ at Corinth so that this sin left unaddressed, unresolved is growing in its impact on others. It has a polluting, a decaying effect. So this is why we must, this is another reason why we must fight sin because it's not just about you and God, it's about you and your brothers and sisters and the Lord. This corporate nature of the body of Christ, you read through the New Testament and you just see it over and over and over again. We are much more connected than we realize and so our sin affects others just than ourselves.

So it's essential work. It's essential work to protect our own souls but also the souls of those that we care about in the body. It's distinctive work, it's essential work, and thirdly, it is an impossible work. It is an impossible work. Building the city walls in this circumstance was an impossible work. They were surrounded by opposition. We've seen that we're gonna see it again and again and again as we read, but one of the things that Nehemiah does a great job under the Spirit of the Lord is letting us see how intense and consistent and ardent the opposition was against them. It happens right at, twice in chapter 2 we see it, and then as soon as we get through in chapter 3, chapter 4, verse 1, "Now it came about that when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became furious and very angry and mocked the Jews." And it's gonna go, he's gonna get all of his buddies together and they're gonna come again and again and again trying to mess things up.

So it's impossible from the sense of opposition but what really makes the work impossible, that is pursuing holiness is impossible humanly speaking. It is impossible humanly speaking. You cannot do it. I cannot do it. It must be done by the power of God. It must be done by the Spirit of God. It must be done through the word of God. And you see this hinted at in the fact that here are these people who are inexperienced, they lacked training, they lacked skill, and yet they're called upon to build this wall with opponents all around them working to try to hinder everything they're doing, and they're gonna end

up doing it in record time. This is the supernatural empowerment of God happening here through the ordinary course of what looks like are just regular ordinary days.

This is one of the things that's really interesting about the way the Old Testament flows. As you read your Bible carefully, you will see this. As the Old Testament moves on and, well, you have these seasons of extraordinary miracles that happen in the Bible, and you really have three extraordinary seasons of miracles. The first is under Moses, the second is under Elijah and Elisha, and the third is under Jesus and the apostles, but what you have happening as you read through the Old Testament is men of God are still following the Lord but things are looking more and more mundane, less and less miraculous on the surface. This is the trajectory of Scripture. This is why we believe the Bible teaches cessationism, that is that the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit are not around anymore, especially not for looking for miracles and signs and wonders; that that's against actually the, I mean, God can do whatever he wants to do, of course, and he heals people, I'm not saying that, and he may choose to do some miraculous sign anytime he wants to and you can pray for that, it's okay to pray for it but making it so important that you miss the big point of Scripture is that whatever signs were done, were done to point to the spiritual miracles that really need to happen. The spiritual miracles are the real miracles and they are the only miracles that will last. Everybody who was resurrected in the Old Testament still died. It wasn't about changing their eternal destiny, just the physical resurrection. I think most of those people probably got saved spiritually as a part of it too but it wasn't the physical miracle, it was the spiritual miracle. And when Jesus is healing the man born blind, it's to show us that we're spiritually blind and we need to be healed spiritually.

So back to what's happening in Nehemiah, they're, like I said last week, they're going through just the day-to-day grunt work of clearing away debris and building a wall. They're digging out stuff. They're probably having to use sledgehammers to break up some big pieces of mortar that are too big to move and so they're doing that. They've got wheelbarrows and they're, you know, carrying stuff. It's heavy. They're sweating. There's dust everywhere. It's kind of miserable. I'm sure on many of those days it's probably hot at times, they're discouraged, and yet in the midst of that seemingly mundane activity the Spirit of God is doing a miracle. This is what I'm saying, God does his most extraordinary miracles now. He delights in doing them in ways the world can't see or explain. He does them in people's hearts. He transforms characters. He takes men who are completely self-centered and just always about everything, their pleasure, their happiness, and punishing anybody who gets in the way, and he turns that person over time by laboring and working in the word of God, being disciplined, and working to put off sin and put on righteousness, he turns that person into a man who is meek and gentle and loving and God says, "That is the kind of miracle I love to do." That's what he wants to do. That's the work we're called to do and it's much more wonderful and glorious than somebody even getting up who's lame and walking. I mean, I vote for that too. I'd love to see that but I'd much rather see that person who might be lame get up and walk, do it spiritually because I want them to go to heaven, not to have a physical miracle and then end up in hell.

So we have this calling and it's an impossible work. To change the hearts of people, to change your heart, to change other people's hearts is impossible. To overcome sin is impossible. The Bible makes this clear in Joshua, it's throughout the Old Testament, you see this too, that the Lord calls them to things that he knows they can't do so they'll come to the end of themselves and see they must depend upon him. Joshua says to the people at the end of Joshua, he calls them to serve the Lord. They say, "We will serve the Lord for He is our God." And then Joshua says this to them in chapter 24, verse 19, they say, "We will serve the LORD, for He is our God. We're gonna do what you said, Joshua. We're gonna serve the LORD, for He is our God." Joshua says, "You will not be able to serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God. You will not be able to do it." That's not a really nice parting word. Joshua's about to die and that's what he ends up with, "You're not gonna be able to do it." Moses did the same thing, "You're not gonna be able to do it," in Deuteronomy. Jeremiah said, "Can the Ethiopian change the color of his skin or a leopard change his spots? If that can happen, then you also can do good." Can we change the color of our skin? Can we change anything about ourselves like that that's a fundamental reality? No, we can't change anything fundamental and we cannot change our sin nature. We do not have the power.

That's why we need the Gospel and we must have the Gospel. You cannot pursue holiness until you have first been born again. All the efforts, all of the changes, whatever you're able to do and people can change in some ways, they change the outward manifestations, they fight against an addiction, but the reality is they're just, that sin's just moving somewhere else, probably a lot of times in self-righteousness but also in other areas where they're now feeding the flesh because human efforts are of no ability to restrain the flesh, the sin nature. So you must be born again. Jesus said, "To see the kingdom of God, you must be born from above." You must be born by the Spirit, you must come to truly know the Lord Jesus Christ. You must have the Spirit given to you. God must take out your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. You must see that there is no hope, that there is no good thing in you and you must run to Christ trusting in his finished work, dying in your place on the cross for your sins, rising again from the dead to give you his righteousness, and you must place all of your faith in him. Now then after you've become a Christian, after you've been born again, you must continue to fight for holiness exactly the same way you came to justification, you came to salvation. Colossians says, chapter 3, as you receive Christ Jesus the Lord, or chapter 2 actually, as you receive Christ Jesus the Lord, so also walk ye in him. The way that we pursue holiness is not by our own efforts and our own strength in itself. There is a part of effort, yes, but the effort is essentially to cling to Christ. The efforts that we make and there are efforts, there are disciplines that we need to cultivate in our lives, we need to be in the word, we need to be in prayer, we need to meet with brothers and sisters, we need to confess our sins to one another, but ultimately in all of that there must be the power of God at work in us. The Spirit of Christ must be working in us. We cannot pursue holiness without the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me show you this in one place, Romans 8. So when you see an area of your life that God makes clear, he shows you the distinctive thing he wants you to work on by showing you your sin and you understand how important this is, how essential this is, how urgent

this is, but you have to remember it's an impossible thing. You have to remember, "Not by might nor by power but by My Spirit says the Lord." It's through union with Christ that you are saved from not only the penalty of sin but it's through union with Christ that you are saved from the power of sin. It is from learning to abide in Christ and rest in Jesus and seek him with all of your heart that you overcome the power of sin because the Spirit works through that.

Romans 8:12, "So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh--for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die." That is, if you're living and your life is never changing, that you're continuing in the same sin patterns unabated and over time you're more and more hardened, if that's the case, if you're living according to the flesh, you must die, that is, you are going to go to hell according to this. "But if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live." That is, if you're not changing it shows that you haven't been born again, that there is no life in you, and therefore what you need to do is stop trying in your own efforts and go to Christ, run to him to save you, ask him to save you and then to learn to abide in him. But the way that we put to death the deeds of the body, the way that we build the wall of our holiness and we help others to build the wall of Jerusalem by pursuing holiness is we learn to by the Spirit put to death the deeds of the body. We learn to walk by the power of the Spirit to become holy.

I'm gonna talk more about this in weeks to come but I want to just say, leave you with this brief description. I said earlier as you receive Christ Jesus the Lord, so also walk in him. Walk by the Spirit, you'll not carry out the deeds of the flesh, Galatians 5:16. What does it mean to walk by the Spirit? What does it mean to put to death the deeds of the body by the power of the Spirit? What it does is it means this, that when you are tempted to sin, you are learning in the temptation to run to Jesus. You are learning when tempted to run to Jesus and you confess to him the reality of your need of him even in that moment. You rejoice that he's forgiven you. You rejoice that you're clean. Even though you're struggling with temptation at this moment, you rejoice that you're clean and in his sight you can run and draw near to the throne of God with boldness because of what he's done, and this is the beginning of the turnaround because you now are running to God in the moment of need. You're asking for grace in the moment of need. You're not trying to do it on your own.

Now this is gonna happen as you discipline yourself to be thinking about the word of God. You discipline yourself to pray. There are things that have to happen but even as you do that, you're asking Jesus all the way to help you. I mean, I find myself doing that often when I'm realizing I need to read my Bible and I will think, "I don't want to read right now." And I'll confess, "Lord Jesus, thank You that You never were like that. I'd rather do this right now," and I'm honestly telling the Lord that, and this is wrong and it shouldn't be this way, "But Lord Jesus, thank You that You weren't that way. Thank You that Your meat and Your drink were to do the will of Your Father who sent You and be that for me right now. Help me to have Your heart." You see, I'm running to Christ and I'm looking to him to give me what only he can give me but it's not that I'm being passive completely. No, I'm actively pursuing Christ and in actively pursuing Christ, what

happens is his heart begins to shape my heart. I'm acknowledging this sin still in me and I'm putting it to death like it says here, I am putting it to death by the Spirit, the Spirit's power. "Lord." Now I'm making myself start reading and I'm still praying as I'm doing that and I'm making myself read and I'm trusting in Jesus and suddenly many times along the way somewhere I begin to feel the wind of his Spirit behind me and now I'm really delighting in reading. Now sometimes that doesn't happen every time, it doesn't happen a lot of times. A lot of times I read and it was like laboring through it. Well, the Lord has a way of doing that to teach us not to always wait for that burst of wind but to be faithful.

But Jesus is the answer always. It's always all about Christ. This is why some of those precious words of the New Testament are "in Christ." If you have come to know Jesus, you are in Christ. You are accepted in the Beloved. You are loved by God forever in spite of your performance but if you are in Christ, how can you be in Christ and not want to be like him? And even as you realize you don't want to be like him as you ought, run to him about that. Even as you realize you don't want heaven as much as you ought, run to Jesus about that because he always wanted to get back to his Father. And as we keep running to Jesus, we just like it says in 2 Corinthians 3, as we're looking at Jesus, I love this image, he says, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty," and he says we as those looking in a glass are being transformed into his image from glory to glory. As you look at Jesus, what happens is you become more and more like what you're looking at by the power of the Spirit. If you're a Christian, that is your calling and listen, there are areas of your life, there are areas of my life where it seems so hard and we can get discouraged but that's no excuse to stop building. The stakes are too high. The cause is too great. The glory of God is worthy of that. Christ is worthy of that.

So let us arise and build, looking not at how difficult it is but look at the author and finisher of your faith and who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross. Run behind him and as you do that, you will find that you are becoming more and more like Jesus, you are building the walls and you're helping other people to build the walls and we become more holy. That's God's wonderful plan for us.

Let's pray.

Our Father, we thank You for the privilege of being called the sons of God. There's nothing in us to commend us to You but we thank You that Jesus is everything that is worthy, and to be connected to Him is to be an heir with Him. He took our sins so that we might have His righteousness. Lord, let us have His righteousness on a daily basis. Let us look more and more like Christ every day. Let us truly fight sin. Let us not lose heart. No matter what happens around us, let us be about the work You've called us to do, the work You've called us to do is to be holy for You are holy. Lord, do this for the glory of Your Son and we pray this in His name. Amen.