

Leadership in the Contemporary Church 7
Unless the Lord Builds the House (Nehemiah 11-13)

Psalm 127

Nehemiah 12:27-47

Let me conclude our look @ Nehemiah and the Godly leadership he exercised by giving you a whistle stop tour of the final chapters and then focus on this psalm which N could have used as his theme tune, a psalm which today we need to heed if we are to do anything which is significant and lasting for the Lord in this generation.

N is a leader who thinks first then acts, who establishes proper priorities and uses his time wisely: hence his effectiveness! Once God had laid on his heart Jerusalem, he spent 4 months thinking and praying till the vision became all encompassing, before he shared it. Only then did he come into the city to rebuild the Walls. Opposition came, but he did not shoot from the hip, he thought it over and prayed, and God showed him how to handle it, and only then did he act. Once the walls were built he didn't plunge in, he thought and prayed, and got an Ezra. Thinking is hard work. It includes praying and quietness, and it calls for faith to project into the future. As Leaders how much time do we give to simply listen to the Lord: pray for your leaders as they take a day in August (3rd) to do just that!

And so to the whistle stop tour of the final five chapters: C9 is the longest recorded prayer in the Bible and its two elements are crucial to Christian growth: repentance and confidence in God.

The key crescendo of the prayer is the last line: v38 "all agreed and they put it in writing": giving it the status of a covenant, in essence they all said: amen, so be it! I guess congregations these days don't make covenants as previous generations but I wonder whether they should do, to declare what the Lord requires of them today?

C10 lists who signed (N plus 22 priests, 17 Levites, and 44 heads of home/leaders. Total 84 leaders). In essence they were saying: ***Lord we don't want this to simply be an empty set of words.***

We want it to be a promise nailed down. We declare our dependence on you and each other. We sign our names to prove our promise! You see they had separated themselves from worldly lifestyles and chosen to be different and they had an understanding of what they were doing (not just input but insight!). They promised to obey the Lord and honour Him in their homes. And the culmination of the chapter is an affirmation in v.39 that they will not neglect the House of our God! Now there's an interestingly challenge. For us today the Temple is right within us: God has made his home not in some exclusive religious shrine but within. As Paul says: Our Bodies are a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). So do we neglect our House of God! I hope not. Are our body's temples of the Holy Spirit: do we care for our bodies in a way that honours Christ? (1 Thessalonians 5:23 Spirit, Soul (Mind, Will, Emotions) & Body).

C11 speaks of almost 50,000 who moved into Jerusalem to live: 10% were moved in by force but 90% were there by conviction and calling. They did not care who got the glory: they simply wanted to serve God. They were the ***willing nameless ones*** who truly gave the City a heart. Similarly in Acts 8 you have the nameless ones who were scattered by the persecution that followed Stephen's martyrdom. In the Greek: Idiotes, fools for Christ. The Lord will often choose to use those who are not seeking any glory for themselves. Five groups are covered and include those who worked within the temple, on the outside of the temple, and those who were prayer warriors and singers. Each was crucial to God's Mission and so it is today. The lessons for us are that your gifts make you valuable but not necessarily famous, and that every labour of love is remembered by the Lord. Our final rewards will be determined on the basis of faithfulness - not public applause. It is the willing ones who have and continue to shape St Andrew's life and witness.

C12 shows us how leaders need to be happy people (not grim reapers!!). Observe the regular celebration of holy success and spiritual progress: an acknowledgement of God's hand at work!

They dedicate their works to the Lord, knowing that it is He alone who gives all success and progress. The high point of the chapter is the dedication of the Wall featuring N's ragtime band (joyful worship with lots of different instruments: cymbals, harps, lyres, with lots of singers) and a march around the Wall with two choirs meeting in the middle! They purified themselves realising that holiness always precedes happiness, and then N & E both led choirs round the opposite ways. V 43 says that the Joy of Jerusalem could be heard from afar! (Proverbs 17:22/15:13) v 43 is also the text to justify all-age worship! Happiness is not dependant on outward circumstances but inward flow!! The dedication of the walls is followed by the willingness of the people to give with joy to the support of the temple personnel. We too need to willingly and gladly support the ministry and mission happening in and going forth from this place (1 Timothy 5:18, 1 Corinthians 9:9).

C13 focuses on the on-going challenges and N's clear response. It's his second term as governor and the people have grown lax about keeping true to their covenant so N reminds them of this and makes the necessary corrections. How contemporary some of the issues faced are: v4-9 encourages the people to reject carnal compromises, v 23-27 to refuse evil alliances (soul ties) and not to marry unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14). We too need to become much more accountable to one another in our walk with God! But what I like the best is the final scene with N on his knees again before God seeking His grace for the day!! That's godly Leadership and how the Contemporary Church needs it!

Today's Church needs it's N's and E's working together with God's people to re-establish its effective witness: its needs leaders who hear the voice of the Lord to: Walk with Me! Psalm 89:15 TMsays 'Blessed are the people who know the passwords of praise, who shout on parade in the bright presence of God. Delighted, they dance all day long; they know who you are, what you do - they can't keep it quiet! Your vibrant beauty has gotten inside us

- you've been good to us! We're walking on Air!' In ancient European Monasteries Monks walked along dark corridors with candles on their toes giving them light to see the next step. That's leadership, that's ministry and that's the challenge to rebuild the Walls of the Body of Christ in the UK and put within them the glory of transformed lives.

So let me leave you with this challenge which sums up N's leadership and ministry: Unless the Lord Builds the House its builders labour in vain. (Psalm 127:1).

For St Andrews this means that the moment we think we can do it, the moment we go into the flesh, that's the moment our effectiveness will die. Jesus wants to build us up as a congregation and only He can: its His Body, it doesn't belong to us or the URC, it's His! He needs to be the architect of all we do; the foreman as its takes shape, and the absolute focus to all who look on from either the world or the wider Church.

For our households this means no compromise with the world, no synthesis with the prevailing culture, we choose to go against the flow. And we honour Jesus who builds our families, and sustains and deepens our relationships.

And for our own lives: it means taking seriously that our Bodies are now the Temples of the Holy Spirit. Unless we allow the Lord to build our temple, to purify our lives and direct our efforts and attention we will flounder. Let us not labour in vain because we have not obeyed the Lord in an area of our lives.

Unless the Lord watches over Canterbury the watchmen guard in vain: We need to renew with great vigour our intercession for this city, crying out to God for mercy and standing in the gap. He still watches over Canterbury but let's never take that for granted!

Vanity which is the temptation of this world calls you to struggle in the flesh, but the Architect and builder of our lives and the Body of Christ speaks a different word and invites us into His rest. He then redirects us to what is of supreme importance: our

fruitfulness: spiritual sons and daughters are the heritage He has prepared for us: a quiver full which will give the enemy of our souls a bloody nose. So this summer as you consider your discipleship choose to draw and line under mere Christianity and embrace the glorious opportunity to be a spiritual mum or dad to many. The Life Groups are but one tool to achieve such a goal.

Jesus says to you and me: See I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me. He calls you to rebuild and revive and to be fruitful once again.

Our walk with Jesus (The Master Builder) will be a forever commitment: for unless the Lord builds the House, its labourers labour in vain.

Pastor David

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