

Night Rider

Nehemiah 2:11-16

Nehemiah 2:11-16 – *“So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days. ¹² Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me; I told no one what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem; nor was there any animal with me, except the one on which I rode.*

¹³ And I went out by night through the Valley Gate to the Serpent Well and the Refuse Gate, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem that were broken down, and its gates that were burned with fire. ¹⁴ Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King’s Pool, but there was no room for the animal under me to pass.

¹⁵ So I went up in the night by the valley, and viewed the wall; then I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned. And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, or the others who did the work.”

Background Notes

Nehemiah lived in the “post-exilic” time period of the Old Testament. Post-exilic means “after the exile.” The Jewish people had been in exile in Babylon for 70 years. God had allowed the armies of the Babylonian Empire to conquer Jerusalem and take the people into captivity because of their sin. But, in His grace, God had permitted them to return to Jerusalem when the Persian Empire came to power in 539BC.

The Jews who returned eventually finished rebuilding the Temple; it took them about 20 years. But the city walls that had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar continued in a state of disrepair for another 70 years. The lack of walls left the city defenseless. Finally Nehemiah, a Hebrew cupbearer and most likely a personal advisor to the Persian King Artaxerxes I, returned to Jerusalem to lead the people in rebuilding the city walls.

In this section of chapter 2, Nehemiah made an inspection of the ruined walls to see what needed to be done. He and a few trusted colleagues make the inspection at night so they wouldn’t attract a lot of attention. He was keeping his plans secret during the planning stages. He didn’t want to arouse the suspicions of the surrounding pagan provinces; they didn’t want Jerusalem to become a strong city. So Nehemiah did his inspection it at night.

Going completely around the walls in that day would have been a two-mile circuit, and the inspection would have probably taken a few hours. As I was preparing this Talk, I couldn’t help but remember my night run around the present walls of Jerusalem. I was studying for several weeks at the Institute of Holy Land Studies, and a few of us went out at night and ran around the walls of the Old City. It was about a three-mile run (and not all easy going!). I was vividly reminded of that night run when reading Nehemiah’s night inspection. By the way, a few sections of Nehemiah’s wall still stand today.

Doctrinal Points

1. Biblical leadership involves careful planning.

In our previous talks, we've mentioned that Nehemiah is an excellent model of a Christian leader. Thus the book of Nehemiah is a great book to study for leadership principles.

Notice that Nehemiah didn't start building before making careful plans. He was in Jerusalem for three days before he told anyone what he was planning to do (v11). What was he doing for those three days? No doubt he was asking questions, getting information, and getting the lay of the land. And he certainly would be praying!

Then he made a personal inspection of the situation. He shared his plans with a few people, and told them his vision for the project. Then they went out to see the actual situation, and decide where to start. And remember, Nehemiah had already made plans to provide for the materials that would be needed (v8).

Biblical leadership involves careful planning. If you're in a leadership position, or God calls you to lead in some area of Christian service in the future, make sure to follow the model of Nehemiah. Carefully plan out where and how you're going to lead. Don't "fly by the seat of your pants"! Biblical leadership involves careful planning.

2. Inspection is an important step in spiritual wall building.

There's a spiritual picture emerging from the book of Nehemiah. Jerusalem was the city of God's Temple, and God wanted it to be a strong city - a city that could defend itself - that couldn't be conquered easily by an enemy. In the same way, God wants Christians to have strong spiritual walls. God's people today are the temple of the Holy Spirit. God wants to see strong spiritual walls in our individual lives, in our family lives, and in the lives of our churches - walls that will help us to defeat the enemy and defend the faith.

We have already seen that **concern** was an important step for getting the walls built. Remember, Nehemiah had prayed for several months. He had wept, he had mourned, and he had fasted about the sad condition of Jerusalem's ruined walls.

Now here we see that **inspection** is another important step. We need to inspect our spiritual walls. Are there weak areas? Where are they broken down? Is there debris that needs to be moved away? How do we start to do some repair?

This applies to our spiritual walls as individuals, or in the lives of our family, or whatever ministry we are involved with, or in the spiritual walls of our churches. We need to inspect the situation, decide where repair is needed, how to clear the rubbish, and how the repair work will begin. Inspection, then, is an important step in spiritual wall building.

Practical Applications

1. Check out your spiritual walls.

As Nehemiah inspected the physical walls of Jerusalem, we need to inspect our spiritual walls as individuals, as a family, or the spiritual walls at our churches. Where do we need to clear away some rubbish and debris? Is it in the area of wasted time? How about some of the literature we read or some of the movies we watch? Are we involved in success or materialism – in accumulating more money or more “toys,” or in making an impression on others with our possessions? What debris has got to be moved out of our lives? We need to check out of the condition our spiritual walls.

Where do we need to rebuild? Are our prayer lives weak? Some of us may need to look at and check out our spiritual walls there. How about our study of Scripture? Are we making time for the study of God’s Word? What about our family devotions? Do we even have such a thing as family devotions? Do we make them a priority? If you’re a father, you have the responsibility to be the spiritual head of your household.

What about supporting of your local church? Are we just Sunday morning spectators, or are we really concerned and active in building strong spiritual walls at our local churches? We need to get involved in Christian service.

Have you ever thought through this question: “If God were to begin a revival of His people starting with me, what area of my life would He need to work on first?”

2. Don’t rush into Christian service projects.

Notice – even though Nehemiah was totally dedicated to the need for rebuilding the walls, and he was even willing to sacrifice his position at the Persian court - he still didn’t rush into the wall-building project.

In the same way, we should not rush into Christian service projects. In Nehemiah’s situation, there had been months of prayer and preparation. Then when he arrived in Jerusalem, he still didn’t rush ahead in a frenzy, or brag about how he was the new governor, or begin to blame and harangue the people. No. He waited quietly for three days. He prayed. He shared his vision for repairing the walls with a few people. Then they went out quietly, by night, to inspect the wall. He didn’t rush into the project.

We too should not rush into our Christian service projects. We have to be careful not to get carried away by our zeal! The Lord taught that before we begin a project, we should “count the cost.” Luke 14:28-31: *“For which of you, intending to*

build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it - lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish'? Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?"

The Lord taught us to make careful thought and preparation before starting a project or ministry. Count the cost! And that certainly applies to Christian service. Don't rush into Christian service projects. Don't get carried away by your desire to serve the Lord.

A few years ago, a guy told me that the Lord had called him into the ministry. He planned to leave his job selling insurance and go into the ministry, and he wanted my counsel. I asked him, "What are you doing right now to serve the Lord?" Was he teaching a Bible study or a Sunday school class? Was he sharing the gospel with those around him? He had to admit that he wasn't doing any of those things - but he was sure that God was calling him to go into ministry! I counseled him not to rush into anything, but to start by leading a small home Bible study. That's generally the way God guides us.

Well, the man didn't like that counsel. He left his insurance business and went to seminary. Six months later he was back selling insurance. Seminary hadn't worked out.

God had called this man to serve Him (as He calls all of us), but God had not called him to leave his job and rush into formal training for ministry. This man was carried away by his zeal and desire to become a minister - and he rushed into what he thought the Lord had called him to do without taking careful thought and preparation.

Some of my Bible college students have rushed into full-time foreign missions before they were fully prepared - and some of them have had to return home, disappointed and discouraged. They hadn't prepared by getting involved in "mission work" in their local home churches. They hadn't listened to the counsel of mature believers. They hadn't prepared by serving, they hadn't planned carefully, and they hadn't understood the cost.

Nehemiah was not like that. Nehemiah prayed, planned, inspected, and checked out what he was going to do. He even hid his good plans until the right time, only sharing his goals with a few close trusted friends. It's not wrong to hide your good intentions as you're counting the cost and planning.

So let's think big, as Nehemiah did, but let's also follow his model. Let's not rush ahead of the Lord into our own ideas of Christian service projects. Don't rush into Christian service projects!