

# **Sermons 2008**

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# Chapter 1. Arise and Build

READ - *Nehemiah 2:1-20; 6:15-16*

TEXT -*So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days. And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God. (Nehemiah 6:15-16)*

THEME - To build a work that glorifies God, we must first start.

## 1.1. Introduction

First, the setting - the Israelites were in captivity, having been defeated and carried to Bablylon in 586 B.C. Jerusalem had been destroyed and lay in ruins. In 538 B.C. some exiles were allowed to return to Jerusalem, led by Zerubbabel, and in 448 B.C. Ezra led a second group to return. The book of Ezra records this return and the subsequent rebuilding of the temple, which took place then.

Our story begins in 445 B.C., with Nehemiah leading yet a third group to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls which still lay in great piles of rubble around the perimeter of the city. The project was large, the obstacles were many, and yet Nehemiah and the people managed to complete the task for God.

Let's consider their example, this morning, for we are asking God to build a work here in Randolph. We have been praying for growth, praying for God to build something magnificent here to honor His name. Such should always be the goal of the church.

As far as I can tell, every New Testament reference to the church describes an organization (or organism) that is moving forward; not sitting still.

ILLUS - The church is described as a building, which is being erected piece by piece, growing from a individual construction materials, if you will, into a magnificent edifice that glories God. A building that stops rising before it is completed is the opposite picture to what the church is supposed to be.

*Upon this rock I will BUILD my church... (Matthew 16:18)*

*Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:5)*

ILLUS - The church is described as a body, which develops and grows just like a human body. A body that stops growing and developing is the opposite picture to what the church is supposed to be.

*Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. (1 Corinthians 12:27)*

ILLUS - The church is described as an army, always advancing and never retreating, not stopping in its advance until the enemy is defeated. An army that stops and gives up in the middle of the fight is the opposite picture to what the church is supposed to be.

*... upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (Matthew 16:18)*

*Put on the whole armor.... (NO ARMOR FOR THE BACK) cf. Ephesians 6:10-18*

As a church, we must grow... we must advance... we must build. In the book of Nehemiah we see a great example of building a work for God. Bear with me as I make a couple observations from it.

## 1.2. If we would build a work for God, we must plan our work

Nehemiah's project, like all projects, had a planning phase, starting with:

1. See the need of it.

READ - *Nehemiah 1:1-4*

When Nehemiah was informed of the distress of his people, it affected him. He saw it, not only with his eyes, but with his heart. He was moved to action because he first saw the great need.

No work for God can be built until the need is first felt. This church will never grow unless we first see the need Randolph has for this church. On a personal level, you will never find Christ and salvation until you first see your need for Him - your lostness and distress. You will never grow in Christ until you see your need of it. The principle is vital throughout all of our faith.

SONG - Everyday they pass me by,  
I can see it in their eyes,  
Empty people filled with care,  
Headed who knows where...  
People need the Lord.

Seeing the need, not only with our eyes but with our very souls, is the starting point. Do you see the need, church?

ILLUS - We were on our annual Christmas trek to Chicago. Each year we brought our family to spend time with Grandpa and Grandma and visit the museums. This year we decided to finish our Christmas shopping at suburban Woodfield Mall. In the midst of all the fun and excitement, one of us noticed that little three-and-a-half-year-old Matthew was gone. Terror immediately struck our hearts. We had heard the horror stories: little children kidnapped in malls, rushed to a restroom, donned in different clothes and altered hairstyle, and then swiftly smuggled out, never to be seen again.

We split up, each taking an assigned location. Mine was the parking lot. I'll never forget that night - kicking through the newly fallen snow, calling out his name at the top of my lungs. I felt like an abject fool, yet my concern for his safety outweighed all other feelings. Unsuccessful, I trudged back to our meeting point. My wife, Martie, had not found him, nor had my mother. And then my dad appeared, holding little Matthew by the hand.

Our hearts leapt for joy. Interestingly enough, Matthew was untraumatized. He hadn't been crying. To him, there had been no problem. I asked my father where he had found him. "The candy counter," he replied. "You should have seen him. His eyes came just about as high as the candy. He held his little hands behind his back and moved his head back and forth, surveying all the delicious options." Matthew didn't look lost. He didn't know he was lost. He was oblivious to the phenomenal danger he was in. This is a candy-counter culture, where people who don't look lost and don't know they're lost live. (Joseph M. Stowell, *Moody Monthly*, December, 1989, p. 4)

Randolph needs this church. You and I need this church. But mostly, the lost who surround us this morning and have no idea they are in such dire condition NEED THIS CHURCH. Do you see the need?

## 2. Seek the Lord's help.

READ - *Nehemiah 1:4*

Nothing happens without prayer. In one of our recent mid-week prayer meetings, I quoted the great Puritan John Bunyan, who said, "You can do more than pray, after you have prayed. But you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed."

Once Nehemiah saw the need, he knew the first and most important thing he could do was take it to God in prayer.

Last night I took a journey  
To a land far "cross the seas;  
I didn't go by boat or plane,  
I traveled on my knees.

I saw so many people there  
In deepest depths of sin,  
And Jesus told me I should go  
That there were souls to win.

But I said, "Jesus, I can't go  
And work with such as these.'  
He answered quickly, "Yes, you can  
By traveling on your knees.'

He said, "You pray; I'll meet the need,  
You call and I will hear;  
Be concerned about lost souls,  
Of those both far and near.'

And so I tried it, knelt in prayer,  
Gave up some hours of ease;  
I felt the Lord right by my side  
While traveling on my knees.

As I prayed on and saw souls saved  
And twisted bodies healed,  
And saw God's workers' strength renewed  
While laboring on the field.

I said, "Yes, Lord, I have a job  
My desire Thy will to please;  
I can go and heed Thy call  
By traveling on my knees.'  
(Source unknown)

We cannot all preach - but we can ALL PRAY.

We cannot all be evangelists - but we can ALL PRAY.

We cannot all be musicians - but we can ALL PRAY.

We cannot all be missionaries - but we can ALL PRAY.

We cannot all be leaders - but we can ALL PRAY.

We cannot all be builders - but we can ALL PRAY.

If the Lord is ever going to build a work here, it will be in direct proportion to the prayers of God's people from this place. Are you praying? Will you pray?

**Note:** A couple of thoughts come to mind:

This is why we have mid-week prayer service, which has been growing lately, praise God. This is why we opened the church for the National Day of Prayer, an event which several of our number participated in, praise God. I commend the fact that many of you are actively praying - KEEP IT UP!

This is a great ministry for our shut-ins. They can still pray and be a vital part of what God is doing here. When you minister to our shut-ins (and you should), remind them of this great ministry.

3. See the enormity of the task.

READ - *Nehemiah 2:12-16*

Nehemiah was under no illusions - this was going to be a big, seemingly impossible, task. Can't you just imagine the thoughts of despair running through his mind as he rode through the rubble in the dark and considered what he had gotten himself into?

*For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? (Luke 14:28)*

Serving God is not an easy thing. Many enlist thinking it will be easy duty, only to find out the Lord expects us to actually SERVE. When it comes time to pick up stones and start building the wall, many become no-shows.

If God is going to build a work here at Randolph, it is going to involve work... cost... difficulty.

ILLUS - Renaming the church may ultimately prove beneficial, but it's going to take effort, and cost.

A key part of planning our work is to see and prepare for the cost of it. Nehemiah wasn't caught by surprise later on, because he prepared for the enormity of the task up front.

ILLUS - Our local Mt. Union College football team is the winningest team in all of football. It can accurately be stated that they almost never lose. One of their secrets to success is their preparation. They work so hard to prepare for a game, that when they get on the field they simply outlast the opposition. They have prepared... they have lifted weights... they have conditioned themselves... and they out run and out last the competition. Watch a Mt. Union football game and you'll usually see them looking fresh as daisies in the fourth quarter, while the opposition is dragging and exhausted.

Before Nehemiah ever picked up a stone, he planned his work. He saw the need, sought God's help, and saw the enormity of the task (i.e. counted the cost). Then, and then only, he started to build.

### 1.3. If we would build a work for God, we must plan our work, and then work the plan.

As Nehemiah moved from talking to doing, from planning to working, four main concepts surface - four concepts that we need to implement if we are going to build here - Nehemiah STARTED, he WORKED, he FOUGHT, and he FINISHED. If we had time this morning, we could learn great things from each of those concepts - things like the importance of teamwork (chapter 3) (EXPAND JUST ENOUGH TO TOUCH ON ALL DOING THEIR PART - ALL EXERCISING THEIR GIFTS), and the importance of building and battling at the same time (chapters 4-6) (EXPAND JUST ENOUGH TO REMIND THAT WE ARE IN A BATTLE AND THE ENEMY SEEKS TO DEVOUR US. WHEN WE START A WORK FOR GOD ALL HELL WILL BREAK LOOSE AND THE FIGHT WILL BE ON. "IT'S ON!" SATAN IS NOT TOO CONCERNED WITH THOSE WHO ARE DOING NOTHING.). We'll save those for another day, though, because the most important step in the plan for us today, is the first step in the plan.

#### 1. START (cf. 2:11)

Nothing happens if you don't start.

ILLUS - In the project management world, there is a term to describe the inability to get started - "analysis paralysis." i.e. getting stuck in the planning phase and never actually getting started.

ILLUS - A friend graphically taught me this concept one day. We were working in the pristine sanctuary of the church, preparing to install some new speakers in the walls. This involved cutting the beautiful walls, and I stood before them paralyzed, unable to make myself mar the wall for fear of messing it up. He watched me for a second, and then walked up to the wall and with an exaggerated swing of his hammer smashed a gaping hole in it.

QUOTE - A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. (Unknown)

We are considering renaming our church today. It is a major step in trying to build something for God. I have prayed about it for a year and a half. I have shared this vision from before I accepted the call to this church until now. Suffice it to say, I have seen the need, sought the Lord, counted the cost, and shared the vision. Some of you have been praying with me about these things.

BUT WE MUST ACTUALLY START SOMETIME! And I believe it is time to start.

The principle applies everywhere.

- It applies to your salvation.

You can think about your need for the Savior forever, but if you never actually take that first step of calling out to Him, you will never be saved. YOU HAVE TO START.

*For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. (Romans 10:13)*

I am constantly amazed at how people put off salvation. If a Publishers Clearing House representative appeared on your doorstep and offered you a check for a cool million, you would accept it without hesitation. But when the King of the universe offers you riches infinitely more valuable - eternal life and salvation - you hesitate.

ILLUS - I recently spoke with sister Jill's father as he lay ill. Her father is 94 years old. I spoke with him of salvation, and asked if he had ever trusted Christ. He was unsure whether he had, and I asked if he would like to do so today. He said, "Well, I guess if I'm ever going to do it I better get to it." I was reminded of another man in his eighth decade of life who, when asked the same question replied, "I'm not ready yet."

Listen to me, my friend - if you're ever going to see heaven, you need to take that first step of faith. YOU NEED TO START!

*Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, FOLLOW HIM... (1 Kings 18:21a)*

**Note:** This is one of the reasons baptism is such an important thing in your Christian walk. It is the FIRST STEP OF OBEDIENCE... it is your START in serving Christ.

- And it applies to us as a church, trying to build a work for God.

ILLUS - (This is dated, but good) - Kim Linehan holds the world record in the Women's 1500-meter freestyle. According to her coach, Paul Bergen, the 18-year-old is the leading amateur woman distance swimmer in the world. Kim does endless exercises and swims 7 to 12 miles a day. The hardest part of her regimen? "Getting in the water," she says. (From Texas Monthly, quoted in Reader's Digest, June 1981)

Is the idea of renaming the church a cure-all? No - but it's a START!

Will it result in a full house overnight? Probably not - but it's a START!

Will be be opposition and cost? I HOPE SO, for that's a great indication of whether Satan is concerned about what we're doing! But more importantly, IT'S A START!

In coming days, we'll have to come together as a team, just as Nehemiah and his people did.

In coming days, we'll have to learn to hold a trowel in one hand and a sword in the other, just as Nehemiah and his people did. We'll face the same 4 enemies he faced in chapters 4-6 - the enemy of "half-way" (cf. 4:6), the enemy of discouragement (cf. 4:10), the enemy of distraction (cf. 6:1-9) and the enemy of fear (cf. 6:9-11).

But none of that will happen, and none of it will matter, if we don't START.

ILLUS - One of the most satisfying moments in building my current home was the day I drove the first stake in the ground. It was a START.

## 1.4. Conclusion

May I draw your attention to one last passage from Nehemiah in closing this morning? READ - *Nehemiah 6:14-15*

What a glorious day that must have been! The wall was finished! The task was done! The planning and building were in the past!

And most important of all - everybody who saw it knew God had been in it - *they perceived that this work was wrought of our God. (vs. 16)*

Let us arise and build, church... build something for God, so that Randolph and all else who would look upon it perceive *that this work was wrought of our God.*