

All-Play
Noble Cedar Week 5: Commitment Card Sunday
Nehemiah 3
2/26/17

Welcome/intro/vision

And if you're new, you've picked a watershed, game-changing Sunday to join us.

Next Sunday, we're launching another worship service at 9 a.m. in Pittsboro at Chatham Mills—one church, two locations, it's going to be awesome, talk more about that in a few minutes!

While at the same time we're purchasing 10.5 acres right around the corner on Andrews Store rd that we hope will one day be the site of a brand new facility right here in Northern Chatham

And so as we're getting ready for both of these things all at the same time we've been talking about what kind of a church we want to be, what's our mission and what's our vision

And specifically we've been asking everyone to be praying and considering how or if they might give towards a capital campaign to enable us to purchase the land to start with that will one day host a building

Today after 4 weeks of talking about all of this, we're collecting people's commitments cards as we commit together to being a part of this effort

And as we've said throughout this whole series we don't want anything to do with leveraging guilt or strong-arming people to get people to give, that's just not how we want to roll

But we are excited about the work and the mission and vision of this church and the future that God is opening up right in front of us, and we want everyone to be a part of it in some way, shape or form:

Praying, volunteering, serving, inviting your friends and neighbors to come and see what God's up to here

And there are all kinds of very good reasons why anyone of us might not be able to contribute financially or just don't want to contribute financially and that's perfectly fine

We've just been asking everyone to be on the journey with us of praying and asking God, "How would you have me to be a part of what you're doing here at Chatham Community Church?"

The image that we've been using for this series is this promise that God gave in the Old Testament to the people of Israel when they were a small, conquered, over-run people

[I myself will plant it... that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar. And under it will dwell every kind of bird; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest.]

God said that he would take them and plant them and make them into a NOBLE CEDAR—big and strong, with tons of branches and lots and lots of fruit

And that all the birds of the air and all the nations and the various peoples all around them would one day make their nest and find their rest and dwelling in that noble cedar, in their strength

And there's this tremendous biblical principle that we've been talking about over these past 4 weeks as we've touched on this passage but haven't explicitly addressed

And the principle is this: ***the gifts of God are always intended to flow through us, not stop with us.***

God re-making Israel into a Noble Cedar is not just so that Israel can beat their chest and declare how great they are. They are to become a Noble Cedar in order to serve who? All the other birds of the air!

Their strength is to be a gift to all the other nations around them.

When God gives us strength or abilities or resources in any way, shape, or form, it is intended to be a blessing certainly to us but not just for us but for other people

This is true for us individually and it's true for us as a church and that's the kind of building we're thinking about building

And so we've been talking about and dreaming about what it might look like for Chatham Community Church to be a noble cedar church community, a strong place with lots of branches not to make us so great

But so that we might be **a gift and a blessing** to all kinds of people in our community, even people in our community who don't like church and don't want anything to do with church or church-type people

To make us a church that you could invite anyone and everyone to come and see what God has done for us in Jesus

We are asking God to make us into a noble cedar church community that has Jesus at the center of it all and as a result practices radical hospitality that welcomes and serves all kinds of people

And we're asking all of us to help make a building happen because a building gives us deeper roots and stronger and more diverse branches to serve all the people of Chatham County

About 150 years after God makes that promise to Israel, he starts to stir up a man named Nehemiah to help make it happen

Israel is still a conquered people, Nehemiah is living several hundred miles away from Jerusalem and he's a servant of the king when he hears that the capital city is still in shambles and in ruins almost 150 years after they were over-run

And this breaks his heart and he fasts and prays and cooks up a plan and then he boldly asks for and gets permission from the king to go back to his people and rebuild the city

And last week Nehemiah arrived and he surveyed the city and then he called all the people to tackle this massive re-building project of the city wall around Jerusalem

And so this week, we're going to get one of those chapters in the Bible that if you're a Bible-reader you typically skim right over—because Nehemiah 3 is a long, long, long, long list of hard-to-pronounce NAMES

Here you go!

[chapter 3 scrolls through movie-credit style at super-fast speed]

In this list you've got GREAT stuff like: ***The Fish Gate was rebuilt by the sons of Hassenaah and Malkijah son of Harim and Hasshub son of Pahath-Moab repaired another section and the Tower of the Ovens.***

Why? Why do we have this recorded in the Bible?

First, you know the classic construction site looks like, right? Here's a pic, 7 guys standing around while one guy does all the real work!

This project isn't like that.

This list of names is telling us that everyone in the community bought in and was involved, even if a few of them did slack off as we'll see in a minute

Nehemiah is celebrating that everyone is a part of it!

Secondly, Nehemiah's meticulous and detailed account of all the people who worked on any part of the wall reminds us of this deeply important and deeply biblical value:

There are no overlooked people in God's kingdom. Every person matters. And every work done faithfully matters.

Whether they repaired a small section of the wall or a big important section of the wall, every single person is recorded and we're reading their names 2,500 years later

Some of you, this is why you're here this morning, so I'm going to say it again.

Every person and every work done in faith and in response to God's prompting or leading matters to God

whether you're changing diapers or washing dishes or working in cube-world or teaching in a classroom or repairing cars

or listening to a co-worker sob about their disintegrating marriage or leading a small group Bible study or starting a non-profit or trying to get your house in order or your finances or your schedule under control

None of our faithful actions are wasted, or lost or missed by a God who sees everything and knows everything and remembers everything

That's good news, amen?

The last thing I want to do as we come face-to-face with this long list of names is to equip you to read your Bibles a little bit better, here's what I do when I come up to a long list like this
I look for who gets extra ink and why.

In the first 5 verses into chapter 3, it's been a pretty straightforward list of names and what section of the wall they've repaired
but in verse 5 we get our first variant on the pattern

5... The next section was repaired by the men of Tekoa, but their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work under their supervisors

Who's had a slacker boss before?

So you've got a group of men, the Tekoans, who are doing their thing and repairing their section

but you've got the noble class, the elite class, the wealthier class, who actually are foreshadowing the DMV work site of the 21st century by standing around and leaning on their shovels

even though they've got site supervisors who are directing them and encouraging them to get to work

You know what, these nobles of Tekoa guys might be wealthier than anyone else, they might have nicer clothes or bigger houses than anyone else

but 2,500 years later are we reading a story that tells us their net worth or that talks about the size of their house or how many jet-ski's they owned?

2500 years later, what are we reading about? That they wouldn't put their shoulders into the work

At various points in our lives God will give us a clear and obvious building or re-building project to do around something that really matters

Marriage, kids, career, health, finances, faith, or an issue in the community like schools or kids or caring for the sick or marginalized or even a ministry that God's called you to step into

if God has given you a work to do, a building or re-building project in your life that really matters, the Scriptures would call you to roll up your sleeves and work at it with all your heart, soul, mind and strength

Everyone else in this chapter is remembered for what they DID do, these guys are the one group of people who are remembered for what they DIDN'T do.

That's not the legacy that they WANTED to leave, right? Nobody would want the one thing that we DIDN'T do to be the one thing that everyone remembered

But we don't always get to choose what parts of our story get told. And so when God gives us a work, if you're here knowing that you've got a work that you need to do in your life

I want to invite you to lean into it with all the resources that God's given you

In fact, the men of Tekoa are so committed, so dedicated, so faithful and just going to do whatever it takes to get this thing done

That EVEN THOUGH their nobles refuse to fully participate, 22 verses they are one of just a couple of groups of people who are listed as repairing a SECOND section of the wall

²⁷ Next to them, the men of Tekoa repaired another section, from the great projecting tower to the wall of Ophel.

The men of Tekoa refuse to let EITHER their leaders OR the hard work that they've ALREADY DONE be the limiting factor as to the kind of difference they're willing to make in the work God has given them to do

They finished ONE section without the help of their nobles and they have every reason to tag-out and say

'we're done! We've finished our part without these rich guys helping out, the rest of you need to step up and do your part to get this thing done!'

But when they finish their first section of the wall, instead of a self-righteous, look how great we are, we did this all by ourselves attitude

With servants' hearts that look a lot like Jesus's, they looked around for what they could do next to get this thing done.

These guys are totally my heroes, I want to be like them if I ever grow up!

The men of Tekoa know what needs to happen, they know how huge this project is, and they're not looking for excuses, they're looking for opportunities.

They're not looking for excuses to get out of the work, they're looking for more opportunities to be a part of the work

In my own life, if I'm honest sometimes I'm looking for opportunities and sometimes I'm just looking for excuses to tag out.

And sometimes, for some seasons, we need to rest, we need to recover, we need to heal, we're spent and taking some time away for a little while is exactly what needs to happen

Or other times there's work in a situation that someone else really just needs to step up to do and we shouldn't rush in and do it for them all the time

all that's true

But in the big stuff, the work that really, really matters, these men of Tekoa challenge me and if you'll let them they'll challenge you to have our default posture to be looking for opportunities rather than looking for excuses

Where do you need to go to work today in repairing a section of the wall in your marriage, with your kids, in your work place, in the local school, in our community, in your finances or health?

Where are you tempted to say, "I've done my part" and look for excuses as to why it's everyone else's turn to step up?

And where might there be instead opportunities for you to step in and repair yet another section of the wall and leave a mighty legacy like the men of Tekoa?

Let's look at another bit of ink that stands out in this long list of names:

¹² Shallum son of Hallohesh, ruler of a half-district of Jerusalem, repaired the next section with the help of his daughters.

So first, here you've got a politician of some sort, a ruler of a half-district of Jerusalem, he would have been well-known and an established figure in the community

and he's working hard, so not all of the wealthy or powerful people were slackers

But also, Shallum didn't do this work alone. He did it with the help of his daughters. Girl power was in full effect in this part of the wall reconstruction!

And in this time and in this culture, this wasn't women's work, this was men's work. But Nehemiah dutifully records that Shallum did this section with the help of his daughters

Because it happened, everyone is invited to be a part of the work, and everyone who serves and works gets noticed and celebrated

Women have played crucial roles all throughout the Scriptures and throughout church history to facilitate the work of God going forward, even if it hasn't always been recorded or noticed or celebrated

But here Nehemiah notices and celebrates and records it so that we might know how broad the diversity of people was who were a part of this

In fact, throughout this chapter we've got a huge variety of types of people who help make this thing happen:

daughters and priests and rulers and merchants and nobles and goldsmiths and even perfume-makers get in on the action

Some of them just repaired the section right in front of their own houses, others repaired large chunks of the wall

But all of these people, all of them contributed in order to make it happen

And over all of this, there are two big factors in play:

first, God is at work over all of this whole thing—God's the one that's landed this on Nehemiah's runway as Kokeita likes to say

and God's given Nehemiah favor with the king and if you read the whole story God's protecting the project from enemies and giving Nehemiah wisdom to manage some of the internal politics

God's fingerprints and his power and his grace and his mercy and his resources are all over this whole story

And at the same time, the people as a community have rallied together and God's plan A for changing the world is to work through people—broken, messy, beautiful people like you and me to do his work

And because the gracious hand of God was upon them, and because everyone from priests to perfume-makers were willing to respond to the call from God through Nehemiah to take on this project

Here's what we find out a couple of chapters later in Nehemiah 6: ¹⁵***So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days.***

Fifty two days! For a project of this size—that's ridiculous! Some of you have had toilets running for this long that you haven't gotten around to fixing.

Because the gracious hand of God was upon them AND because just about everyone was willing to serve as best they could

this huge project which had been left undone for almost 150 years was now completed

God initiated it, God protected it, God sustained it, and the people cooperated with it, kept in step with God's calling, and because of all of that, the project was a tremendous success

In your building and re-building projects in your life, two key ingredients to see success: God's hand and our cooperation with God's hand to do the work he's given us to do

Today as a church we start a totally new phase of our existence. This church has been here for 10 years, today we're moving into a new era with two parts

One is the launch of a new campus in a new location, which we will celebrate and pray for here in a few minutes

And the other is the beginning of our own building project that we pray has both of these same markings: God's all over it, God's initiated it, covering it, started it, guiding it, steering it, protecting it

And we as his people, we're all in on it, we're all participating and all a part of it in whatever way we possibly can

And this morning, as we move to our time of commitment, I want us all to step back and recognize that this is a holy moment

And that what we're doing here will leave a legacy for generations to come—not likely that anyone will be reading it about it 2500 years from now

but we pray that what we do here impacts and affects lives for many generations here in our community

And this morning, we're going to invite you to participate in a couple of ways.

In a minute, we're going to move into a time of worship and as we sing, we're going to invite you if you're willing to come to the front and pick-up a Noble Cedar prayer reminder

This is cedar wood that's been burned with CCC initials and a cross

and we'd ask you to take this home and put it somewhere where it will prompt you to pray and seek the Lord on behalf of this church and our vision to become a noble cedar

One missionary famously said, that all the really important work is done through prayer

We want to ask each of you to take a cedar circle here and put this somewhere where it will prompt you to pray and pray and pray that God would build us into a noble cedar.

And up here as well is a little cedar box. If you have decided to make a financial commitment towards the purchase of property that will eventually lead to a building, we're going to invite you to bring your commitment card up front with you and drop it in this box

We'll be distributing cards now if you need one feel free to raise your hands

some of you might have come with yours already filled out as you've been praying and thinking about it this week

Others of you have already submitted your commitment to the finance team folks or via email, that's great, no need to turn in a card if you've already sent an email, but feel free to come up and get a prayer chip

As we've said throughout this series, there's a whole host of reasons why you might NOT make a commitment this Sunday, and there won't be any repercussions if you can't or just don't want to make a commitment

If you just don't have the money, if you're new here, or if you're just not sure that you're on board spiritually with what we're doing here

You're welcome here and please hear our genuine gratitude for you and the freedom to not make a commitment this morning

But what we're doing here is that holy work that we talked about earlier.

This basic biblical principle that whenever God gifts us with any sort of resource, it's intended to flow through us, not just stop with us

This includes our skills and gifts and abilities as well as our financial resources. And so this morning, we have a chance to participate in the generous resource dance of the kingdom

And our confidence is the same confidence that Nehemiah had:

because the gracious hand of our God is upon us, and because of the willingness of us as a community to do this, we trust and believe that God will do this thing, in his timing, when and as he sees fit

So we're going to move to a time of worship now and invite you to come forward to be a part of God making us into a noble cedar community

To pick up a cedar prayer prompt and to make a commitment if you're able and willing to do so

PRAY

[WORSHIP & COMMITMENT TIME]

PRAY TO SEAL COMMITMENTS

PBO Commissioning

-MC Team

-Renovation Vol's

-Volunteers in new spaces in past 3-4 months or starting next week

-If you're going next week