

Nehemiah #3: Chapter 7-12

by Stephen Kaung

The sermon emphasizes the importance of strengthening the life within the wall, which is essential for the testimony of the wall to last.

Duration: 48:02

Scripture: Exodus 27:20-21, Nehemiah 8:1-3, Nehemiah 8:5-6, Nehemiah 8:9, Nehemiah 8:13-14, Nehemiah 8:18, Nehemiah 9:3

Topics: "Church Unity", "Repentance Covenant"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the unity of believers in Christ. He describes a gathering in a large tent where people from different backgrounds come together to worship and listen to the word of God. However, outside the tent, the speaker observes the presence of various denominations and sects, each promoting their own literature. The speaker highlights the importance of balancing the guarding of doors with diligent praise and service to the Lord. Additionally, he emphasizes the significance of the people's initiative to gather and ask for Ezra, a scribe well-versed in the law, to read the book of the law to them. The people respond with repentance and make a covenant to keep God's word, which strengthens the life of the city and God's people together.

Transcript

This is Monday evening, December 3rd, 1973, in Richmond, Virginia. Ministry is given through Brother Stephen Kong. We return to the book of Nehemiah, chapter 7. The first three verses.

Nehemiah, chapter 7, verse 1. And it came to pass when the wall was built, and I had set up the doors, that the doorkeepers and the singers and the Levites were appointed. And I gave my brother Hananiah the ruler of the citadel, charged over Jerusalem, for he was a faithful man and feared God above many. And I say to them that the gates of Jerusalem should not be opened until the sun was hot, and that they should shut the doors and bar them while they stood by.

And that there should be appointed watchers of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, everyone in his watch, and everyone over against his house. Chapter 8, verse 1 to verse 3. And when the seventh month came, and the children of Israel were in their cities, all the people gathered together as one man to the open place that was before the water gate. And they spoke to Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which Jehovah had commanded Israel.

And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation, both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. And he read in it before the open place that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, in presence of the men and the women and those that could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law.

Chapter 10, verse 32. And we made ordinances for us to charge ourselves a yearly with the third part of a shackle for the service of the house of our God. And so on and so forth.

Verse 39. For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the heave offering of the corn, of the new wine and the oil into the chambers, which are the vessels of the sanctuary, and the priests that minister and doorkeepers and the singers. And we will not forsake the house of our God.

Chapter 11, verse 1. And the princes of the people dwelt in Jerusalem. And the rest of the people cast lots to bring one of ten to dwell in Jerusalem, the holy city, and nine parts in the cities. And the people blessed all the men that willingly offered themselves to dwell in Jerusalem.

Chapter 12, verse 27. And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought the Levites out of all their places to bring them to Jerusalem to hold the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgiving and with singing, with cymbals, lutes and harps. And the children of the singers were assembled, both from the plain of Jordan round about Jerusalem and from the villages of the Nephite, also from Bethgeogol and out of the fields of Geba and Asmaveth.

For the singers had built themselves hamlets round about Jerusalem. And the priests and the Levites purified themselves, and they purified the people and the gates and the wall. We have been fellowshiping for the past two sessions on the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem.

We mention that not only our life together with God must be restored to its rightful place, but our life as brethren, one with another, must also be restored. And these two sites are typified by the rebuilding of the temple and the rebuilding of the wall. For people to dwell together behind a wall, for people to live together in a city, it is the picture of the brethren dwell together in unity.

And that will become a real testimony to the world. The first six chapters in the book of Nehemiah deals with the building of the wall. And we find the wall was finished.

In troubleless times. In 52 days. It wasn't an easy thing to rebuild the wall.

Because when they were rebuilding the wall, attacks came from every side. Not only from the enemies from without, but even from the people within. Nehemiah was under pressure, assault, accusation of all kinds.

And even false prophets and prophetess prophesied against Nehemiah. And yet, Nehemiah knew what God was doing. And the hand of the Lord was with him.

And with the people. So in 52 days, the wall was finished. It's strange to say, after the wall was finished, Nehemiah did not dedicate the wall immediately to God.

We will think that if a wall is finished, suddenly the next thing will be dedication. But no. The wall was finished.

And yet, there were more works to be done. Within the wall. Or unto the wall.

In a sense, the wall is an outward public testimony. But whether that public testimony can stand or not, or how firm, how good is that testimony, really depends upon the life within the wall. In other words, the life behind the wall is the strength of the wall.

If the life within the wall is weak, sooner or later that wall will be broken again. And this we already find. In the first place, the wall in Jerusalem, laying in ruin, was completely destroyed.

Why? There was once the wall was there. But it was completely destroyed. Because the people who dwelt within had been unfaithful.

So unless the life within the wall is strengthened, the testimony of the wall will not. You know, sometimes in a time of revival, in a time of great awakening, or in a time of refreshing, or even in a time of oppression, persecution, God's people may be brought together and stand up as one. Strange to say.

You see a unity there. But unless this is being established, strengthened, rooted, it does not last long. So brothers and sisters, after the wall was completed, Nehemiah knew that the life within the wall must be strengthened.

Unless life within the wall was strengthened, the wall that was rebuilt might not be continued. As a matter of fact, probably Nehemiah spent more time in strengthening the life within the wall than in building the wall. It might take him only 52 days to rebuild the wall, but probably it took him much longer to strengthen the life within the wall.

And how true it is today. We need to join, to be joined together. We need to be united together as one.

We need to be built up together as a wall with no breach. But brothers and sisters, this is not just in the time of revival, refreshing. I think I mentioned that before, but for the sake of illustration, I may use it again.

Once a year, Christians from all over the world, in July, the second week of July, will go to a small town in England. That town's name was Kazik. Once a year, Christians from all over the world will gather there for that Kazik convention.

They had the best speakers you could get in any generation. And people from all over the world will be there. There was a large tent put up for a great big meeting.

And behind a platform, the sign, all one in Christ. People came from all kinds of backgrounds. But when they gather together, when they sing together, when they listen to the word together, you do get a feeling of they're all one people.

Thank God for that. But do you know, when you step out of the big tent, as you walk along the streets, here a booth, there a booth, and every booth represents a denomination, represents a sect, and every booth is selling their literature, and as you go along the street, you are just being pulled, torn. In the tent you have the wall, but outside the tent are the bridges.

In time of revival, all God's people can really be joined together as one. And again I say, under persecution too. But does it last? For this testimony of the unity of God's people to be really lasting, something more must be done.

The life within the wall must be strengthened. So in Nehemiah spent time. You know what he did? He did a number of things.

Number one. He appointed doorkeepers. It is a wall.

But brothers and sisters, if the whole place is walled in without any doors, you know what would happen? There is separation, yes. But the separation is so exclusive, there is no door to it. It is a prison.

It is a dead city. No coming out and no going in. There will be no increase.

It is a dead city. Thank God you have not only the wall, but you have the gates. The wall stands for separation, but the door stands for coming in and coming out.

In other words, the doors represent communication. The wall represents separation, but the door represents communication. The Lord Jesus said, you are not of the world.

That is separation. But after we are separated from the world, the Lord said, I sent you to the world. As the Father has sent me, so have I sent you to the world.

There is not only wall, but there is door. You can come out from the city to reach out to the world in order to bring them in. Communication.

And people who desire to come in, they are always welcome. There is no exclusiveness in the fellowship. Thank God for that.

You know, God's people sometimes can be so separated that they have absolutely no communication whatsoever with people in the world and even with other people of God. They just roll in as a prison. And if this should happen, it is a dead city.

We need to be separated. And yet, we must have communication. We must have communication with the world in the sense of not partaking in their sins, but in the sense of winning them to Christ.

That they may become our brothers and sisters for the increase of the city. We need to be open to all God's people and welcome them, that they may come in and strengthen the life of the city. There must be open fellowship.

Open fellowship. But remember, you do not only have the openings, there are gates, doors, with bars and locks. Sometimes you may have openings, but there is no gate.

There is no door. There is no lock. There is no bar.

In other words, there are openings, but it's always open, day and night. No control whatsoever. No.

There are openings, but there are doors. In other words, our communication with the world is under control. The doorkeepers were appointed.

Before the sun went down, they closed the door and locked it. And they did not open the doors until the sun was warm. In other words, communication and fellowship is only in the light.

You cannot have communication in darkness. You know, sometimes we think that we must be so careful lest we be contaminated. So, there is no door.

At other times, we are so open that there is no lock. And the Bible says, evil communications corrupt good manners. There should be communication.

There should be fellowship. But everything must be in the light. Never in darkness.

And here you'll find Nehemiah set up doorkeepers to see to it that all the communications were under the broad daylight. Nothing went on in darkness. That was to keep the unity and the strength of the city.

Suppose you have the doors wide open and without locks. Suppose people can come in day and night. It will dilute the life of the city.

It will corrupt the life of the city. As the Bible says, do you not know that a little leaven can leaven the whole lump, brothers and sisters? Sometimes, you know, we think we should be so open, we should be so loving that there is no control, there is no discipline in the church. It's a democracy.

To maintain the life of the city, to maintain the life of God's people as a testimony, discipline is necessary. God will raise up people taking the spiritual responsibility to see that the doors are closed when the sun went down. People with discernment, people with courage, people with integrity, people who stand with the Lord, sometimes they will be accused as being narrow, too strict, unloving.

But brothers and sisters, God would raise up doorkeepers for the doors of the wall. Very necessary. And more than that, you'll find that aside from the doorkeepers who will see to it that the doors were locked and the doors will be opened, not only locked but to be opened, but during the night, every family would appoint one to guard that section of the wall over against his house.

Why? The enemy may climb over the wall. You know? Under the shadow of darkness, they might climb over the wall and come in to disturb the peace of the city. That is to say, every brother, every sister in the church has his or her responsibility.

Not only in the church God will raise up some like elders, responsible brothers, who will in a sense guard the doors, but every brother and sister is responsible. We are responsible for one another. To see that there is no evil in our fellowship, in our communication.

Quite a responsibility. Unless we know discipline, unless we know responsibility, our life together as one unit is not really built. But very strange.

At the time when Nehemiah appointed these doorkeepers, you know, he appointed some other people. He appointed at the same time Levites and sinners. Now we would say, of course you need doorkeepers for the wall, that's true.

But why did he appoint the Levites and the sinners at the same time? Our life towards the world needs the doorkeepers. But our lives before the Lord needs the Levites and the sinners. That is the life within the city.

We are being built up together into one body. Why? That we may present spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. That's Levitical service.

We are to offer praise and worship to God. This is the sinners. So here you'll find, when you read Ephesians or Colossians, you'll find, be filled with the Spirit and sing to the Lord with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, admonishing and teaching one another, and singing with your heart, giving thanks to the Lord in all things.

Worship. Worship is going on behind the wall. God's people are worshipping people.

Unless we know how to worship God, unless we know how to serve Him as the priesthood, the life of the city is empty. Sometimes people can be very vigilant in guarding the doors, but they are not very diligent in praising and serving the Lord. These two things must be balanced.

Must be balanced. So that's the first thing to strengthen the life within the wall. Then the second thing.

In the seventh month, all the children of Israel were gathered together as one man. And you know what they did? They asked for Ezra, the scribe, to read the book of the law. You know, Ezra was a scribe.

He was one who was well-versed in the law. He studied the law. And it was his burden to return to Jerusalem to teach the people of the law.

He himself studied the law. He himself kept the law. And he wanted to teach the people to keep the law.

That was his burden in coming back to Jerusalem. But that was on his part. But now you'll find the initiative came from the people.

Instead of Ezra gather them together and say, now listen, I'm going to read the law to you. I'm going to teach you the law. No? The people came together and asked Ezra, read the book to us.

We want to hear it. For the strengthening of the life of God's people together, there must be a love for the Word of God. You may have a revival.

You may have a refreshing. You may have quite an uplifting. But if you are not strengthened with a love for the Word of God, that will soon be.

Here you'll find the people had a great love for the Word of God. They asked for it. You don't need to force the Word upon them.

They asked for it. So they all gathered together in that open space at the water gate. And Ezra read the Word to them.

And you know what reverence they had for the Word of God. When Ezra opened the book of the law, all the people, men and women, and those who could understand, they listened attentively from morning till midday. They were not tired of the Word of God.

They were not only listening, but they understood. And they responded. When they heard the Word, they wept.

They saw that they had disobeyed God. They had sinned against God. And they repented before God.

And finally, you'll find, they made a covenant with God that they would keep His Word. Oh, brothers and sisters, for the life of the city, for the life of God's people together to be really strengthened, there must be the love for God's Word. There must be the reading of God's Word.

There must be the listening attentively to God's Word. There must be the keeping of God's Word. There must be a covenant with God according to His Word.

And when you find these things happening, you know the life of the city, the life of God's people together is being strengthened. You have substance now. That's the second thing.

And then came the third thing. They made ordinances for themselves that everyone will give a third of a shackle yearly to the house of the Lord to provide for all the sacrifices and the offerings. And furthermore, they made an ordinance for themselves that they will take turn in bringing to the house the Word offering.

These are the ordinances that you do not find in Mosaic Law. You know, in Mosaic Law, there were many ordinances. How the children of Israel must bring the tithe to God.

How the children of Israel must bring the first fruits to God. And so on and so forth. You'll find in Mosaic Law there were many ordinances.

But here you'll find the people love God so much. Love His house so much that over and beyond what God had commanded, they commanded themselves voluntarily. Ah, brothers and sisters! What an attitude that was! How we are afraid of God's commandment! And we say it's a line upon line and it's here a little and there a little and it add up too much.

But here you'll find these people that love God so much. They said, after God had commanded us all things, let's add something more to it. God did not command them to give one third of a shackle yearly each person.

They made that ordinance themselves. It is true in the temple you need a wood so that the fire on the altar will not burn out. But the Lord never decided, never tell us how this wood would prepare.

And here they made a wood offering. Yeah, they will bring the wood there so the fire would not go out. Brothers and sisters, what love for God and for His house.

Voluntarily. You know, often times I just use it in illustration. Sometimes people will talk with me and say, brother, should we give tithe to the Lord? Like the children of Israel? Should we give one tenth of all our income? And then some people said, this one tenth, should it be after tax or before tax? Ah, brothers and sisters, even with the children of Israel, if you read Mosaic law, you will find actually, aside from tithe, they have offerings.

So it comes up to two tenths. Not just one tenth. Under the law.

And what should happen to us? It is not a matter of the material things I am talking about. I am talking about the Spirit. Oh, that we should love Him so much there is no bargain spirit there.

If the Lord should enable us to give more of ourselves and everything to Him, it is our honor, our privilege, our glory. He deserves it. Now that is the attitude we should take.

It is not in our mouth. Not at all. It is in the Spirit.

Do we love Him? Do we love His house? And if we do, we don't count it. And here you will find the Spirit of the people there. They really love the Lord.

And they really give themselves to the Lord. And brothers and sisters, the wall was really strengthened. That is what happened behind the wall.

It is our life together. The reality of our life together. The reality of our love for Him.

Our love for His house. That really strengthened the testimony of Jesus. Number four.

The city was big. The wall was built. But the inhabitants in the city were few.

In order to increase the life of the city, all the nobles decided they will move to the city and live there. Then some people volunteered. We will move to the city and live there.

In order to increase the dwellers of the city, increase the life of the city. And then they cast lot. And every one of ten will move to the city.

In order to increase the dwellers in the city. And you know, as people in the city increase, the life of the city also increases. So that's the way they did.

What if you have a city, a wall city, and no people living there? It's an empty city. So, they move in. They move in.

You know, brothers and sisters, what does this represent? To move into the city and live was a great honor. Because there was the temple. But at that time, to move to the city to live was a hardship.

Hardship. Not only a hardship, but it was a very dangerous thing. Why? Because Jerusalem was the target of the enemies.

You do not know when the enemies were attacked. But for the love of God, for the strengthening of the city, the nobles set a good example. They move in.

Then the volunteers. And then casting lot. Brothers and sisters, do you like to live in the city? Or you would rather live outside the city and come to the city once in a while and then go back to your own village? Many believers.

Now, I'm speaking it as a metaphor, you know. It's not figuratively speaking. I don't mean that you all should move together and live in one house or so forth.

No, I'm not advocating that. It is the spiritual sense. How many of God's people would like to maintain their independence? They like to have their own lives.

And then they will come in occasionally for a visit. Fine. Fine.

And after a short visit, they go back. In other words, they are never really built up together with their brothers and sisters. They maintain a loosely related position.

Are you willing to move into the city and be together? Bind together? Build up together? And you know how much is involved. Oh, if we live at a distance, we can afford to be very kind to each other. But if we all in the same city, behind the same wall, we rub against each other, and sometimes it's difficult.

Rather be a visitor than a dweller. And you know, everywhere you go, you have lots of visitors. Sometimes, you know, in my heart, my heart just aches.

Sometimes, you know, I'm not speaking of here, but everywhere I go, sometimes I see lots of people come. And yet, visitors, not dwellers. Oh, when you have a conference, when you have a speaker, they all come.

But when the conference is over, when the speaker is gone, they are gone too. Each to his own place. God's people are not dwellers in the city of Jerusalem.

God's people are not built up together, knit together, and built up together. We need some people to set the examples. They are not afraid to live together in the city, to be built up together.

They are willing to bear the cost. We need volunteers, not hosts. But seeing the testimony of the Lord Jesus, they are willing to move to the city with their brothers and sisters.

And then, of course, today we don't cast lot. That is the Old Testament way. They cast lot and believe that God will choose the right one.

Now, in the New Testament, it means that the Holy Spirit within us will lead us. As we are led by the Spirit, let us move into the city, behind the wall, and be built up together. A life naturally that strengthens the life of the city.

So you have contents now. If you just build a wall and there is nobody inside, or what is inside is very weak and empty, everything is superficial. Just an outward appearance.

There is no substance. It won't last long. Therefore you'll find you have to strengthen the life within the wall.

To give substance to the wall. Then the wall will really represent something. So Nehemiah spent quite some time doing all these things.

Dear brothers and sisters, how we need to be built up together. It takes time. Do not be discouraged.

Be patient. With patience and faith we inherit the promise of God. And then after all these things were done, then Nehemiah dedicated a wall to God.

You know, brothers and sisters, this wall was not built just for the protection of God's people. This wall was built for the glory of God. For the testimony of God.

For after everything was done, it was dedicated to God. Lord, you have done it and it is for you. Nothing is for themselves.

And that should be our attitude. After everything is done, remember, it is for His glory. It is to the testimony of Jesus, not for our testimony, as it were.

It is all God's doing. And all glory be to Him. The wall and everything is for His glory.

And I believe this is the right attitude. So dear brothers and sisters, if by the grace of God the life of God's people together is built, remember, there is nothing to boast of man. Everything is dedicated to the testimony of Jesus.

That He may be seen, may be heard, and may be believed. Ah, this is great. So I do hope that in our fellowship on this book of Nehemiah, brothers and sisters, I don't know what to say.

I only feel deep down within me a desire. Oh, that God's people may really be built up together for the testimony of Jesus and for the glory of God. Shall we pray? Oh Lord, restore our life with Thee as a people and with one another as a people.

We pray that we may not only have an outward testimony, but there may be an inner reality of our lives together before Thee. Lord, strengthen. Lord, establish.

Lord, build. And it is all for Thy glory. We ask in Thy name.

Amen.

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