



Pastor Bob was not going to use his phone while driving, that was dangerous

ILLUS:

Today, we're moving to the business end of our series in EZRA/NEHEMIAH - ONE word each week, and each message has expanded a different word..... Last week, Pas. Randal took us into Nehemiah as he talked about FAVOR. This week, we're going to be sitting with a serious construction project in chapter 3 and explore this thing called **VISION**. There are lots of names, lots of project details, lots of key words and phrases in this chapter.

To make it easier to understand, we're going to split this sermon up into two! There are TWO PARTS to this sermon.....

So, in the first part we'll look at what VISION is and in the second part we'll look at how Nehemiah harnessed the vision he had.

Let's define **VISION**

To put it simply, VISION is sight.

Do we need to SEE things the way they are? Sometimes we're unable to do even that because we're blinded by so many things.

When we become born again, our sight is restored. We truly see our sin for the way it is. We begin to see possibilities in Christ Jesus.

But outward vision is a baseline. There's more to vision than just SEEING. **Vision is not just an outward manifestation of SIGHT, but... VISION is also an inward manifestation of insight and foresight.**

We all need INSIGHT. To not just SEE things the way they are but to also see WHY they are the way they are. That's insight.

Once you see WHY things they are the way they are, to also understand what it will lead to, if things are left the way they are. To understand that when God moves people and places people, it's not so they can belong to a new social group, but to advance His Kingdom. That's foresight.

Nehemiah had vision.

Every church is one generation away from dying out. Which means, our vision has to be two generations ahead.

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You see, we need a CUSTOMIZED vision for ourselves, we need a COLLECTIVE vision for our family, a CORPORATE vision for the local church and a COLLABORATIVE vision for the world.

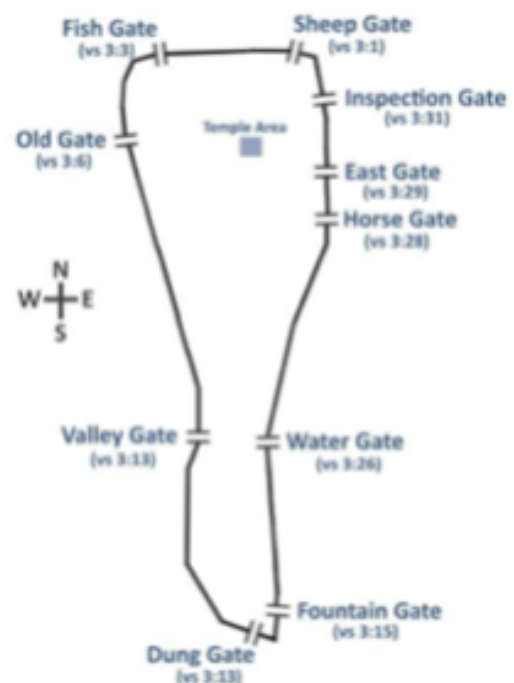
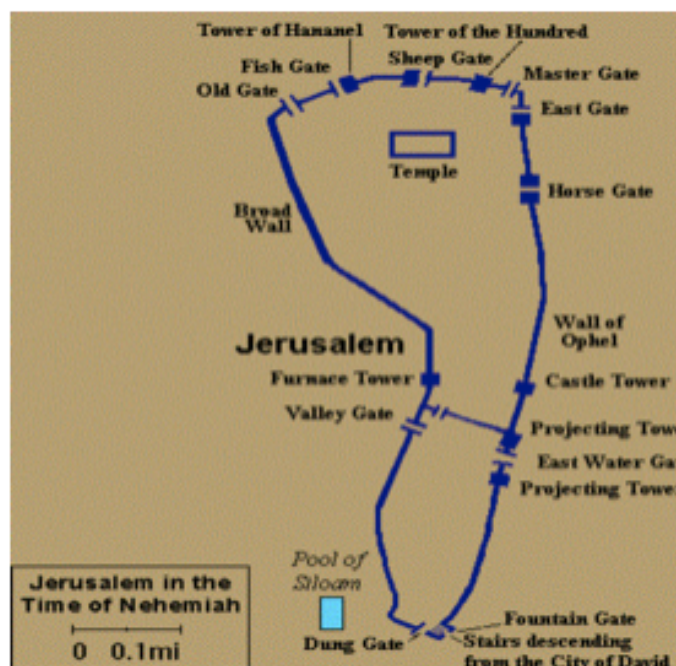
So, that's what VISION is.

And in Nehemiah 3, this vision played out in FOUR areas or places...

Gates, Walls, Towers and Houses....

Now, there's an awful lot of information about the 10 gates, the walls and locations and tribes that we could bring out from the text.

MAP:



This is all some very good information. But I'd rather we be **inspired** more than we're **informed**.

So, let's look at these four broad and then dive into what Nehemiah did with VISION.

GATES - represent authority

The seat of power in each city was the gate. In Gen. 19, Lot sat at the gate. In Judges 16, Samson broke off and carried the gates of a city. In Matt. 16, Jesus said the gates of hades will not prevail against the Church.

In Jerusalem, each of these gates are symbolic in addition to their function. There's one clear takeaway.....Vision has to account for authority.

Who is in charge in our lives? What influences do we allow? What shapes our worldview? Is it the media, friends, society? **Do we have a VISION for our gates?!!**

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WALLS - represent security and maturity

There are two schools of thought here, but the main idea of walls is SECURE LIVING.....(Ezek. 38:11 LSB) "and you will say, 'I will go up against the land of unwallled villages. I will go against those who dwell quietly, that live securely, all of them living (even) without walls and having no bars or gates.'" So then, walls are a symbol of security.

We know today, that Christ broke down the walls between people (Eph. 2), so now, our security is not in a wall of separation, but in Jesus. What does this mean?

Christians are to build walls to protect against the SYSTEM of the world, but not walls to protect against the CITIZENS of the world. We are IN the world, not OF the world (Jn. 17).

This is a tension we have to deal with. Even at Dayspring, Pas. Guy is helping the school understand the real tension between these two.

Look at this very interesting pair of scriptures from Song of Solomon 8:9 - "if she is a wall, we will build upon her...." And then she says in vs. 10 - "I AM a wall..."

What are the things in which we find our security or maturity? Is it in our position? Our education? Or our emancipation? **Do we have a VISION for our walls?**

TOWERS - represent capacity

Towers showcase strength and capacity for military power that comes from diligent watchfulness. When a city's towers fell, the city fell. There are about four towers that Nehemiah was rebuilding. Three in the north and one in the south-west. The message to enemies is clear: we're the first line of defense.

Believers are engaged in battle! But do we have a VISION for our engagement? 2. Cor. 10:4 describes our weaponry.

Who is our strength? Are our weapons SPIRITUAL or are they CARNAL?

We can't do this in our strength, and we can't do this if we're not prepared beforehand. And that's what towers represent for us. A capacity to be prepared and respond with spiritual weapons.

Do we have a VISION for how we prepare for battle... for how we recognize an attack.... for how we respond to attack? **Do we have a VISION for our towers?**

HOUSES - represent unity

For so many people their work assignments STARTED at the house. Depending on the translation you use for Nehemiah 3, you'll see many such phrases...

The work starts where God has planted you - at your home. ‘

The work starts in your dorm, in your own network of influence - within your families - it started with what's right in front of them - let's start by building up your husband or your wife, your children.

Houses are dwellings and they represent families. People united through blood. Is the church a house? Is the church filled with blood-bought saints? Are we dwelling TOGETHER in unity? Are we building TOGETHER in unity?

Ps. 133:1 (NIV) speaks of “How good and pleasant it is when God's people live **together in unity!**”. In the New Testament, Paul urges us.... In Eph. 4 to make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit.

Now that we've seen the different areas in which Nehemiah built, we've got to translate that into how we build our lives, our families, our churches and our communities. That takes us to the second part of this message..... **HOW DID NEHEMIAH CHANNEL VISION?**

He did it in THREE ways - and each of us will be called to make the same kinds of decisions when it comes to our own lives.

You see, the we look at things AROUND us and IN us, we have to make one of THREE decisions about what to do - just like Nehemiah did.

REBUILD? REPAIR? REJECT?

We have to decide - is this thing worth rebuilding all over again?
We have to decide - is this thing worth repairing instead of rebuilding from scratch?
We have to decide - has this run its course? Is this thing to be rejected and discarded?

1. This is serious business

Enemies are all around. They're serious about disrupting your pursuit of Jesus. They will bring every obstacle to bear to prevent you from wholeheartedly building your life in Christ. THEY know this is serious. Do WE?

There were various gates in the project, but each of the gates were considered important to rebuild - even the dung gate!

The dung gate was all about waste, refuse and poo....

ILLUS:

There's a groups of people who didn't take the rebuilding seriously... Look at vs. 5 (Berean) - Next to him, the Tekoites made repairs, but their nobles did not put their shoulders to the work under their Lord.

Another translation says, “they didn’t put their necks to the task” - the meaning is connected to a yoke that is placed on the neck of a bull - and this bull stiffens its neck in pride and does not submit to the yoke. It doesn’t want to put its strength (shoulders) into the work.

The nobles of Tekoa didn’t take the work seriously because their vision was tied to position, not people or purpose. There is no place for this mentality when you’re building the kingdom of God.

ILLUS:

There are two meanings - not working under their “Lord”. Did not want to work under their lord, Nehemiah - or under the “Lord”, Adonai - God.

They didn’t understand that submission to the leader commissioned to rebuild is the same as submitting to GOD who gave that leader the commission to rebuild.

Look at the contrast between these so-called “nobles” of Tekoa and the regular people of Tekoa - vs. 27 (NASB) After them the Tekoites repaired another section in front of the great projecting tower and as far as the wall of Ophel.

These folks took the rebuilding so seriously, they did EXTRA work (another section).

When someone fails at their responsibility, our mindset isn’t, “Well, that’s THEIR job”, but our thinking should be, “how can I help?”.

The late Dr. Tim Keller and alumni of my seminary says, “Do not let your status prevent you from doing God’s work. It’s about collective effort over individual prestige. It is not about status or pedigree, because **some things take WILLINGNESS more than GIFTEDNESS!!**

This actually flows both ways - not only must we sometimes DESCEND below what we think our status is, to do the work of God, but sometimes we must ASCEND above what we think our status is, to do the work of God.

Remember Naaman the slave girl in 2 Ki. 5? While the story is about Naaman, the star is really the slave girl, because she thought NOTHING of her lowly status when it came to being salt and light!

We are serious about the work, but we are also sincere in our work....

2. This is sincere business

The way the project was done, everyone sincerely believed in the vision together. How do we know that? People came from all over the place. They were sincere in their work.

Jericho (vs. 2) is 17 miles away. They left the safety and walls of their OWN places, and came to rebuild from dilapidation because they wanted OTHERS to flourish! That’s a sincere belief in the well-being of others!

The unaffected showed up to build. **Rebuilding isn’t just for those who are CLOSE to the problem.** The brokenness around us is NOT someone else’s problem.

What if the need you feel least connected to is the very assignment that Jesus has for you?

They were sincere because they SHOULDERS the burden together.

31 times in our text you'll see phrases like, "next to him", or "after them" or "beside them". We should be always laboring together - shoulder to shoulder - we don't build alone.

This was sincere work because they knew the value of their work wasn't in their status or calling, it was in their involvement together.

Skilled or not - EVERY believer is involved in rebuilding. If you look in the text, EVERY group is involved.

The work ends up being a community that reflects God's Kingdom. Are we the Holy-Spirit infused crew that works across cultural, educational, social and generational divides to jointly rebuild?

Not every assignment is identical, but each contributes to the whole because they are working sincerely with unity of purpose.

But the work wasn't just serious and sincere, it was also sacred.

3. This is sacred business

Some things were repaired, some things were rebuilt, but some things were rejected...

We've already seen how the people from Tekoa rejected the sectarianism of their leaders.

The builders rejected silos because this was "God's work" - a sacred business.

ILLUS:

The work of God in our lives, in our families, in our churches and in the world is so sacred that calling that is divorced from need is a mere profession and not purpose.

In our text, the perfumer and the goldsmith LEFT their profession and their gifting and went to build!

To be sure, in the next several months we will be working on building an inventory - a gifts and skills assessment - for every one who is IN a ministry and everyone who WANTS to be in a ministry. It is important to get the RIGHT people in the RIGHT place at the RIGHT time for the RIGHT reason. Every ONE of us must find the place of ministry inside CIC and outside these walls. But at the end of the day, there is a place for you, because a NEED represents a calling!

We are not only in place of service God has GIFTED us to be in, we are also in a place of service God has GRANTED us to be in.

Everything is sacred work.

The work is sacred because there was no favoritism. The value of rejecting favoritism - ALL names were recorded - that's just like God - In Mal. 3:16 we see that God maintains a book of remembrance. No one is forgotten. No work is unseen even if it occurs in the shadows. It is God's work and it is sacred.

Let's conclude this with an eye-opening illustration from our text that ties into the gospel!

CONCLUSION:

Nehemiah's repaired city is not the final kingdom. The Bible's story moves toward God dwelling with his redeemed people in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:1-4, 10-27). There, God's people are secure, and the nations are not kept at a distance: the city's gates are open, and the nations bring their glory into it (21:24-26).

This whole construction project as seen in Nehemiah 3 begins in vs. 1 and ends in vs. 32 with the mention of the Sheep Gate. But how is this important to us?

John 5:2 mentions a Sheep Gate or sheep-related place near the pool of Bethesda in the Temple area . And then, in John 10:7 (CSB), Jesus says, I am the gate. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture.

Jesus shows us that just as those sheep are entering the sheep gate to be sacrificed at the Temple, HE was now the gate - HE was the spotless lamb that would enter that gate once and for all. Those sheep had one-way traffic. They only went in and never came out. But Jesus says, if we are saved through HIM, because HE takes the place of that sacrificial lamb, HE dies for us so that WE have new LIFE and can live FREELY for Him.

The lesson of the construction project is that because Christ has brought us near, we can begin the rebuilding work with hope rather than shame (Ephesians 2:13–18).

No one can come to Jesus except he be granted that VISION - that revelation of who HE is. And NO VISION can be build upon anything OTHER THAN on Jesus Christ. No vision is sustainable apart from being built upon the revelation that comes from knowing Jesus Christ. And that's the whole story of the Sheep Gate.