

REVIVING AND REBUILDING YOUR SOUL

NEHEMIAH 2:11-16

Good morning! Last week, we started a new series and we're calling it "Time to Build". It's about building and rebuilding our lives. It's about getting the courage to get on with God's plan for our lives which has been sort of put on hold because of the pandemic. And we're talking not only about our lives, but about this church as well. After 25 years, I think it's time to build. Do you agree or disagree? Spin A Win! You remember that, right, a hit game show in the Philippines emceed by Jeanne Young. If you remember that, you're old like me. If not, go on YouTube. It was really fun.

So, last week I talked about how to have a fresh start. What are the first steps to take if you want to restart. Now, for most of this series, we'll be talking about the steps we can take, the things that we can do to build toward a better future. But in my message today, I want us to look at the things that God is doing behind the scenes. What God was doing behind the scenes in Ezra and Nehemiah and what God is doing behind the scenes in your life, his often unseen work. So, I've entitled this message "Reviving and Rebuilding Your Soul".

Now, before I get into that, before we get into Nehemiah, there are a couple of verses I want us to look at that really set the tone for where we're headed. And the first one is from 1 Thessalonians 5:23, and this reveals to us God's heart. His desire for you. The Bible says this, it's my prayer for you. It says, *"May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. (or make you holy through and through) May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

You see, it's God's desire to bring wholeness to your entire person, spirit, soul, and body. It's not enough for you to get saved just so you can go to heaven someday but in the here and now you're trying to figure out how to live life and find your way through. God wants to restore wholeness to every part of your person. And he says it's spirit, soul, and body. He puts them in that order because he works from the inside out.

The spirit and the soul are not the same. And I'm going to talk about that distinction here in a few minutes, but let's look also at this verse from 1 Corinthians 10:11. It says, *"These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come."* Now, he says these things happen to them. So, what are these things and who are them that he's talking about? Well, he's referring to the accounts from the Old Testament, the histories of God's people. He says, yes, they're true. Yes, they're histories, but they are actually examples for us. They are warnings for us on how to live and how to avoid going the wrong direction.

So, when we look at a historical book of Scripture like the book of Nehemiah, we always want to look for the eternal truth. How does it apply to our life today? What is God saying to us? What is he saying to me? And Ezra and Nehemiah are historic books. These events happened. But we also want to ask what's this eternal truth, what's this example that we can find in how to live? What is the warning that we can find in these passages?

Now, let me give you a little background, a little history of what led up to where we are in the book of Nehemiah.

God's people had been held captive for 70 years in Babylon. Now, what caused them to go into captivity in the first place? Well, there were two things that caused it. The first was that they were no longer putting God first in their lives.

Instead, they had begun to worship the gods of the culture around them and were living by the values of the world around them. And the second thing they did was that they began to hold their fellow Israelites in slavery because of unpaid debts. They refused to forgive the debts of their brothers. And God warned them and said, "You must let go." But they refused to let go.

And so, we read this verse, in Jeremiah 34:17b. God says, *"You have not proclaimed freedom to your own people. So I now proclaim 'freedom' for you, declares the Lord—'freedom' to fall by the sword, plague and famine."* And so, God sent the Babylonians in, they broke down the city walls, they burned the gates, they destroyed the temple, and they took the people into captivity for 70 years, just as God had warned them was going to happen. And now finally, after 70 years of captivity, the people were permitted to return to Jerusalem and to rebuild the temple. And that's what we read about in the book of Ezra. And shortly after that, a few years after the temple has been rebuilt, now Nehemiah shows up on the scene. In fact, in the Hebrew Bible, Ezra and Nehemiah are one book called "Ezra", and Nehemiah is simply the second part of this book. They're together because they tell one complete story. In our English Bibles, they are separated. So, after the temple has been built, now Nehemiah shows up on the scene to rebuild the walls and the gates of the city.

So, here's what I want us to consider as we look at this historic account, that both Ezra and Nehemiah are pictures of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer. In fact, *Ezra's name means "Helper"* and *Nehemiah's name means "Comforter" or "The Lord of Comfort"*. Both of those are names of the Holy Spirit that we find in Scripture, right? So, in the book of Ezra, the temple is rebuilt, worship is revived, and the relationship of the people with God has been restored.

It's a picture of the Holy Spirit reviving, restoring, and rebuilding the temple of the inner man, the inner person, your spirit, and taking up residency in you at that moment of salvation when you give your life to Christ. The Holy Spirit comes in, the Bible says, and he inhabits you.

Listen, when you give your life to Jesus and you ask him to come into your heart, it means the Holy Spirit starts to take residency in your spirit. It's the spirit of God who comes in, brings new life, restores the relationship with God and the temple of the inner person has now been put back together. 1 Corinthians 3:16 (CSB) says this: *"Don't you yourselves know that you are God's temple and that the Spirit of God lives in you?"* So, rebuilding the temple in Ezra is the picture of restoring the relationship between you and God. That relationship was broken when our first parents, Adam and Eve, disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden.

But now when we come to Nehemiah, the temple's been rebuilt, but the city still lies in ruins. The walls are broken down and the gates have been burned with fire. I see this as a picture of believers whose spirit, the dwelling place of God in the inner person, has been revived at salvation, but their soul, which is their mind, emotions, and will, are still broken. Do you see the picture?

Now, do you know any person like that? Someone who claims to be a Christian but inside of them there's just great turmoil going on. That person could be the one seating on your chair.

Through my years as a pastor, I have encountered such Christians. They came to me and said altho' they've committed their lives to Christ, they faced a lot of struggles, emotionally, mentally, spiritually. Some said their life was a wreck. So, their spirit has been revived, has been made alive again, but in the city of their soul, in the rest of their life, there's just so many signs of brokenness. In their mind, their emotions and will, they still have so far to go. They know they're saved, but there's so much brokenness inside of them. In their minds, they can't think clearly.

They're always struggling with doubt, with second guessing, impure thoughts. There's no soundmindedness. And in their emotions, they have no peace. They seem actually almost unable to carry on meaningful, loving relationships because there's just so much rubble and hurt from the past that keeps getting in the way. And in the area of their will, they feel powerless. They lack self-control to say no to the wrong things. They just slip back into old ways all the time. It's like the leftover from a lost battle. And they can't get a clear vision of the future that God has intended for them because whenever they try to look out toward the future, all they see is just more of the past. If this resonates with you, I want to assure you that it is God's desire for you to be restored and rebuilt, your whole spirit, soul, and body.

I want to look at that 1 Thessalonians passage again from the Message paraphrase this time. It says, *"May God himself, the God who makes everything holy and whole, make you holy and whole, put you together—spirit, soul, and body."* You see, it's one thing to have your relationship restored with the Lord. It is an entirely other thing to have your person restored to you. And that's what Nehemiah represents for us. That Nehemiah comes to rebuild the walls and the gates of the city.

Now, as I mentioned last week, the purpose of gates or of walls of cities in the Old Testament were not just for decoration. The walls served a purpose. They provided identity and security for a city. You could see the city on a hill because of the walls around it. They provided boundaries and security for the people who lived there. Without the walls in place, the city was defenseless, vulnerable to attack from enemies from any direction at any time. So, the walls defined a city.

Now, the gates of the city actually served two purposes. First, the gates controlled who got in and what got in, but they were not just for entrance and exit.

The other role that the gates of these Old Testament cities served was that the gates were places of authority. The gates were the places where the city fathers met for counsel. The gates of the cities were where legal procedures occurred, where marriages and the sales of property were recorded. That's what happened in the city gates. So, when the gates were in place, they provided safety and orderly entrance into the city so the rest of the world couldn't just come and go as it pleased. But with the gates in place, the people were also in charge of their own destiny, and they could make wise decisions. They could control relationships with one another and with the world around them.

Now, in the city of the soul, the walls represent your identity, your boundaries, the defenses for your mind, your will, and your emotions. And the gates in the city of the soul determine who gets in, what gets in, and how decisions are made. When your gates are in place, you have authority over your own life and destiny. The gates are what give you self-control. The Bible says this in 2 Timothy 1:7 (NKJV), *"God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."* And as I looked at that verse, I realized that he's addressing in that the mind, emotions and the will. It says he's given us a spirit of power. That's your will because power is energy under control. You control your will. You've heard of willpower, right? Then he's given us a spirit of love. So, that is our emotions. And he's given us a sound mind. That is your thinking and decision-making capacity.

So now when we come to Nehemiah 2, I know that was a long introduction, but when we come to Nehemiah 2, we find that Nehemiah, though he was a Jew living in captivity, he actually had been blessed by God and had been promoted to the position of counselor to the king of Persia, which is modern-day Iran. Persia at the time was the dominant power of that day. And they were the ones now who had defeated the Babylonians and were holding the people captive.

Nehemiah was the counselor to that king. And so, one day Nehemiah went to the king, and he asked permission to return to Jerusalem and to rebuild the city and the king agreed. So, Nehemiah was sent by the king to accomplish this task of restoring the city. And the king gave Nehemiah letters of authority that he could show to the enemies in the area. He also gave him the promise of provision of all the materials he was going to need, and he gave him the protection of his army to make sure that they were kept safe.

And I'm going to talk about those things also in a minute, but let's go to the text, Nehemiah 2 starting in verse 11. Nehemiah is writing, it's like he's writing a journal. He says, *“I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days I set out during the night with a few others. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on. By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire. Then I moved on toward the Fountain Gate and the King’s Pool, but there was not enough room for my mount to get through; so, I went up the valley by night, examining the wall. Finally, I turned back and reentered through the Valley Gate. The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work.”*

Now, how many times did Nehemiah mention the word “night”? Three times Nehemiah emphasizes that he went out by night to survey the damage in the walls and the gates.

Folks, just as Nehemiah was working under cover of darkness, even so the Spirit of God oftentimes works in the dark times, the dark night of your soul. He is already at work even when you don't know it.

Just as God was at work bringing light into the darkness of creation, he is at work to bring light into the darkness of whatever circumstance you find yourself in. You may not be able to see it yet, but he is working in the dark. So, I want you to take note of this first **truth as far as rebuilding the city of our soul** is concerned: **My God works in the dark.**

Now, Nehemiah says this: "Yet I had said nothing to those who would be doing the work." So, the people knew that Nehemiah was there, but they didn't know why. They were aware of his presence, but they were not aware of his plans because he hadn't told anybody yet what he was going to do. If you are in a dark night of your soul right now and it seems like God is not doing anything and it seems like nothing is getting better, be assured that the Spirit of God is already at work in your life. He is surveying the damage. He can see everything about your life. He sees every broken place in the city of your soul, in that wall. He sees every wound, every disappointment, every failure. He sees every weakness and every loss that you've experienced and he is determined to rebuild you, to restore and to fortify you once again.

Remember, Nehemiah's name means Comforter. And to comfort does not mean just to pat somebody on the back and say, "Oh, I'm so sorry. Poor you." That's pity. That's not comfort. To **comfort means to fortify with renewed strength.** To fortify with renewed strength. And God is determined to fortify you with renewed strength through the presence and power of the comforter, the Holy Spirit, in your life. Now, he will not do it for you, he will do it with you. As we're about to see, it requires our cooperation because after surveying the walls and the gates, Nehemiah now reveals his plan to the people.

In verse 17, he says, **"You see the trouble we are in..."** I love that he says we. He doesn't say you. He enters into their pain and takes it as though it's his own. He says, *"You see the trouble that we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates*

have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and we will no longer be in disgrace." And then the people respond by saying, **"Let us start rebuilding.' So they began this good work."** (v. 18) Nehemiah says, "Come, let us rebuild." He doesn't say, "Look, just sit down and take it easy and I'll do everything for you." And neither does he say, "What's the matter with you people? Why can't you get your act together and clean this mess up so I can come here and live comfortably?" Instead, he invites the people into a partnership with himself and with one another. He calls the people to do the work together under his direction.

Now, in the coming weeks, we're going to look at how they rebuilt the walls and the gates. We're going to talk about the materials they used, who did the building, how long it took, and the opposition that the people experienced. Well, let me just say this. This was a quick work. They didn't have time to just clear out all of the debris and then go out and quarry new stones and move them into the city and start all over again. Instead, what we find is that they used the rubble to rebuild the walls. They use the rubble to rebuild the walls. And in the same way, God will take the rubble and the debris from your past and use it to fortify you with renewed strength and build you up for the future that he has planned for you.

So, write this down. In the city of my soul, **the walls of my life are built out of the rubble of the past.** The walls are built out of the rubble of the past. That means all of your brokenness. Every heartache, every disappointment and failure, every abuse or betrayal that you have experienced, God will use it all to fortify you and to rebuild the city of your soul and to restore self-control and healthy emotions and soundmindedness to you. The Bible says this in Romans 8:28 (NLT): **"We know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them."** The Bible says he makes all things beautiful in their time.

And you know what, your greatest ministry will come out of your deepest hurts. God will restore all of that to put your person back together again.

So, what about the gates? Remember the gates control who gets into the city, what gets into the city, and how decisions are made. And Nehemiah tells us that the gates of the city were made of enormous timbers that came from the king's forest. And any builder will tell you if you're going to build a gate like this, a city gate, those timbers must be straight and true. So, what are the gates in the city of the soul made of? In the city of the soul, **the gates of my life are built out of timbers of truth**. The gates are built out of timbers of truth. This truth is the truth of the word of God because it's the truth of God's word that will keep out the lies. It is the truth of God's word that will counter any doubts. It is the truth of God's word that defeats the enemy schemes and his temptations. It is the truth of God's word that can keep you from poor choices and decisions.

Jesus says in John 8:32, ***"You will know the truth and the truth will set you free."*** If you want freedom in your life, you will find it in the timbers of truth of God's word. And just as the outsiders could only enter a city through the gates, even so in the city of the soul, every thought, every doubt, every idea, every decision, every relationship that you're involved in must pass through the authority of Scripture. So, when thoughts and doubts and fears and accusations, when memories come and try to disrupt and intrude on the orderly conduct of your life, you ask, wait a minute, how does this stand up to the truth of the word of God? How does it match up with the mind of Christ? And if it fails the truth test, don't let it in. Close the gate. Don't entertain that thought anymore.

Now, let me get practical with this and show you how this works. Let me go through a list of common lies that assault the city of our souls and some of those timbers of truth that we can use to shut those gates. So, I'm going to read those lies and then I want us to read the timbers of truth aloud together.

Here's the first lie that so commonly assaults the city of our souls. **"You're worthless"**. Well, let's read this timber of truth together: *"The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."* Listen, when that lie, you're worthless, tries to enter the city of your soul, you take this timber of truth, Jesus loves me and he gave his life for me, and you use that like a gate to shut that lie out of your life. You may think you're worthless, but God says, no, you're priceless. Jesus gave his life for you.

What about this lie: **You're unforgivable**. Well, here's the timber of truth. Let's read it together. *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."*

Or what about this lie: **You will always be this way**. Have you ever heard that one? Oh, you're always going to be this way. Well, here's the timber of truth. Let's read it together. *"Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life has gone. A new life has begun."*

Or what about this lie: **Who do you think you are?** Well, let's read this truth together. *"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God and that is what we are."* When that lie comes to you and says, "Well, who do you think you are?" Here's your answer. I'm a child of God. That's who I am because that is the timber of truth in my life.

What about this lie: **It's hopeless**. Let's read this timber together. *"He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion."*

Or this lie: **You're useless**. Well, here's the truth. Let's read it. *"I can do all things through him who gives me strength."*

Here's another lie: **God doesn't love you**. But here's the truth. *"I have loved you with an everlasting love."*

Here's one more lie that assaults the city of our souls: God doesn't care. Well, here's the truth. Let's read it. *“Cast all your care upon him for he cares for you.”*

These are truths to build your life on. These are truths you can use to restore the gates of the city of your soul to protect yourself from lies and accusations and doubts. We have to do what the Bible says in 2 Corinthians 10:5, it says, *“You take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”* So, you bring every thought to the word of God.

And here's the rule. Take note! *If it doesn't stand true, don't let it through.* If it doesn't stand true, don't let it through. It is the word of God that repels the lies of the enemy. It is the word of God that gives us the ability to stand against temptation. It's the only thing Jesus used when he was accosted and tempted by the devil. He said it is written. It is written. It is written. So, we must know what is written in order to have our gates put in place.

Jesus said the Holy Spirit will bring to your remembrance the things he said, but he can't bring it to your remembrance if you haven't first put it into your mind and your heart to begin with. And that's why it's so important for us to be people of the word. To read it, to memorize it, to meditate on it, to devour it, to get into the word and to get the word into you. Why? Because when you know the truth, the truth will set you free. As the Israelites said, *“Let us start rebuilding”*.

Do you need rebuilding in your life right now? This is a call to make a decision, to rise above the rubble and debris of a broken past and to join with brothers and sisters in Christ under the direction, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and to start building a better future. It is the will of your heavenly King. We've read it in Scripture. He wants to restore you -- spirit, soul, and body. So, you no longer have to be vulnerable to the attacks of the enemy, no longer vulnerable to taunts and lies. You no longer have to live in fear. And the people said, *“Let us*

start rebuilding.” So, they began this good work. Are you ready to begin a good work?