

Building Walls, Restoring Lives In the GAP

Text(s): Nehemiah 8-9:5

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In youth group for the past few weeks, we have been talking to our students about standing in the gap for a person, issue, or situation. I believe, as I have told the students that it is our DUTY as people of God to stand in the gap and work towards restoration in the world around us. It is the very first command given to Adam and Eve; God said, *"Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground"* (Genesis 1:28). The word "rule" there is *"radah"* in Hebrew meaning "to have dominion"; the Hebrew word "subdue" is *"kavash"* meaning "to bring into bondage, make subservient, dominate". It is clear that God wanted us to rule this world. Remember, that the enemy was already here; we were to rule and reign and bring the earth into restoration. And now, in the new covenant, the same is true. We are to rule and reign and bring this dark world under the Kingdom's power and authority. We are rulers here! Our job is to restore & to fill the gaps. So studying Nehemiah with this mindset, brings forth a wealth of information about our job here on earth. This story is full of practical application to our all of our lives, but especially the lives of our new graduates.

There's something special about the high school graduation, because its success that makes us stop, pause & reflect. It's like a trumpet has sounded, causing us to stop, reflect on the past and consider what lies ahead. There is a similar moment in the book of Nehemiah.

READ Nehemiah 8:1-9:5

It seems that God counts time based on this Jewish calendar of feasts. Nehemiah 8 took place on the 1st day of the 7th month in the Jewish calendar which was their Feast of Trumpets (the 5th feast in a Jewish year). This feast would have signified the end of the harvest, as it takes place in our month of September. Leviticus 23:23-25 describes God giving this feast to Moses: *"The Lord said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites: 'On the first day of the seventh month you are to have a day of rest, a sacred assembly commemorated with the trumpet blasts. Do no regular work, but present an offering made to the Lord by fire.'" The trumpet (which was a ram's horn) was the signal for the field workers to come into the Temple. The high priest stood on the southwestern side of the temple and blew the trumpet so that it could be heard in the surrounding fields. At that instant, the faithful would stop harvesting even if there were more crops to bring in and leave immediately for the worship services.*

Here's how significant this feast is...Some scholars believe it was on this feast day that creation took place. Zola Levitt, an author and converted Jewish scholar has found that even the development of a fetus follows the feast schedule. On the 1st day of the 7th month (the feast of trumpets) of a baby's development in the womb, it can hear sounds from outside the womb for the first time, making him/ her curious about the outside world. And most biblical scholars believe that the feast of trumpets is when the Lord's trumpet will sound and those of us who know Jesus will be taken into Heaven in the Rapture to come! As Zola Levitt puts it in his book [The Seven Feasts of Israel](#), *"Imagine the scene as a Jew and an Arab worked side by side in the fields, as they do even today. When the trumpet would sound, the Jew would leave immediately, and the Arab, believing otherwise of course, would continue bringing in the crops. Thus the Lord stated, "Where there are two working in a field, I'll take one and leave the other. The Rapture of the Church is very clearly associated with the trumpets..."*

For our purposes today, let's focus on the fact that this trumpet blast signified the end of the work and the beginning of the rest or the new age to come. Graduates, today your trumpet has sounded; you have worked hard in school, and now it's time to rest, if only just for a few weeks or the summer. But this trumpet signifies a new age; a new chapter in your life. It's that moment we talked about earlier; you will reflect upon the past and consider the future.

So returning to Nehemiah, that is exactly what they did in this moment. As they reflected upon their past with God and in the success they had in rebuilding this wall, they did a few things that we can take as advice today, not only for our graduates, but for all of us as we rebuild the people and world around us.

1. **They made room for and protected the presence of God in their lives.** Nehemiah 6:15-16 says, *"So the wall was completed on the 25th of Elul, in 52 days. When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work has been done with the help of our God."* Jerusalem was & is the city of God. The root word of Jerusalem is *"shalem"* in Hebrew. Listen to some of the meanings of this HEBREW word:

"Wholeness, completeness, unbrokenness, God's delight, friendship, peace, harmony, undividedness, health, safety, prosperity, covenant, reward"

They rebuilt the wall to protect the presence of God which is all of these things. Remember, the presence of God did not dwell inside of them yet as believers in God. Only after Christ died on the cross & rose again did they have the Holy Spirit; only then did their bodies become the temple of the Holy Spirit. God's presence on the earth literally was supposed to dwell with the Israelites in the Temple they had built for him. They had neglected that temple, the wall, and the city. God's presence was not being hosted, preserved, protected, or treasured in their lives. Nehemiah's goal in rebuilding this wall, was much more than simply fixing a broke structure; Nehemiah was facilitating the presence returning to the people. How do you host the presence of God in your life?

2. **They read & treasured the Word.** Nehemiah 8:2-3 says, *"So on the first day of the 7th month, Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law."* Verse 5 continues, *"Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up."* We are living in a generation where there are 1000 things fighting for our attention every minute of every day. But we are also living in a generation where there are more technologies to help you read or listen to the word of God than ever before. Find a way to get into the word & treasure it! You are so blessed!

John 1:1 says *"In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made...in him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it."* You will stand strong in the darkness of this world, if the word of God, which is Jesus, lives within you. If you reject or neglect reading the Word of God, you are rejecting or neglecting Jesus himself because HE IS THE WORD MADE FLESH!

3. **They used the Word as a spiritual thermometer.** Here was their reaction to the reading of the Word: 8:9 *"Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest & scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, 'This day is sacred to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep.' For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law."* This was a holiday, a joyous

occasion, and Nehemiah had to remind them. Why? Because they had been applying the Word to their lives for the first time in a long time. They used God's word as a gauge for their spiritual lives instead of the world around them. Compared to the Assyrians, who tortured and murdered entire civilizations, they were doing pretty good, but compared to the Word of God, they weren't. You see, it's easy to look around at the world and think, "I'm not as bad as they are." Our job from the beginning of time, was to subdue this earth. Let me ask you, how good of a job is Marlowe Assembly of God doing in this task of subduing the earth? How well are you doing personally? When we use the world of God as our gauge for spirituality and to answer this question, I think we would see that we have some work to do.

2 Corinthians 5:16-21 says, *"So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who **reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation**: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not **counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation**. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: **Be reconciled to God.**"*

How do we as Christians talk about or treat groups of people like homosexuals, ISIS terrorists or sexual predators? Do we count their sins against them or do we try to reconcile them to Christ? Do we speak truth with love or with judgment? We have a gay nightclub less than 5 miles from this church. We have drug addicts and alcohol abusers within walking distance of this church. We have poverty all around us; children being abused or neglected; who is going to reconcile these people to Jesus? Do we wait for them to maybe one day decide to walk into the doors of this church or do we do something about it now? Using the WORD of God as our spiritual thermometer means that we have to confront these issues, and confront the fears & attitudes inside of our hearts, because one day we will be judged on how well we performed in the ministry of reconciliation. We will stand before Jesus as pastors, as board members, and as individual members of this body of believers, and he will ask us who we touched. Jesus will ask us how we worked for him and he's not going to care so much about how pretty our worship songs were, or how many bulletins we handed out at church...he's going to care about our HEART in doing it. **He's going to care about the heart we have for the lost because that's what his word says.**

Graduates, the world is going to tell you that success means a lot of money, a nice house, and a happy family. They are going to tell you that bachelor's degrees & masters degrees are the goals you should aim for. But the WORD OF GOD says that success is how well you measure up to THIS BOOK, the Bible. So we have to know what's in it and we have to make it our life's goal to obey it, no matter what that means we have to give up! Success means dying; dying to what you want and living for what Christ wants.

Conclusion: Living a life sold out to Christ isn't boring. It wasn't boring for Nehemiah & it wasn't boring for the disciples. Graduates, at your very own "feast of trumpets," as I am calling your graduation, look back at the achievements and awards you have amassed. Be proud of your hard work and your perseverance. Compare your actions with the word of God, not the world and consider a future sold out in service to the Lord.

For the rest of us, I give the exact same advice. Let today be your feast of trumpets. Rejoice in what the Lord has already asked you to do and how he has already used you, but look ahead to the new age. There is MORE he has for you! There is more he can do through you if you allow him to.