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**Date: July 10, 2016**

**Title: A Heart to Build**

**Text: Nehemiah 2:11-14**

I've entitled today's message "A Heart to Build". This is the story of the rebuilding of the walls around Jerusalem under the leadership of God's man, Nehemiah. Let's begin reading at Nehemiah chapter 2, verse 11. <sup>11</sup>"I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days <sup>12</sup>I set out during the night with a few men. 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. <sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup> 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." That is, there was so much rubbish and debris that he could not even get past.

The principles we look at today will be true in the building of OUR LIVES, your FAMILY, and your BUSINESS. We have a CHURCH FAMILY and a CHURCH FELLOWSHIP to build, and these principles will also be true here. Often, when we study a passage of Scripture, we do well to look for three things: #1 – What did it mean then? #2 – What does it mean now? #3 – What does it mean to me personally? In studying the Word, if you will ask those three questions, the Word will become alive to you.

Nehemiah has received a commission from the Lord to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem that were decayed and broken down and fallen, leaving the people of God in despair. I want you to notice six principles that Nehemiah practiced in building the walls.

- 1. Nehemiah Fixed his Focus.** In verse 12 of chapter 2 (look above), Nehemiah had a mandate from God. He was a man who knew how to get alone with God. And remember, he fasted, he prayed, he wept, and GOD HAD TOLD HIM WHAT TO DO. Have YOU done that? Have you allowed the Lord to lead you? Are you just wandering aimlessly like a ship without a rudder, a ship without a sail? Have you just put yourself in neutral and let life push you around? OR do you have a focus? Do you have a goal? Do you have an aim? GOD has a plan for your life. God has something that He wants you to do. You are unique. You are special to God and He made you just like He wanted you to be. And God has a job for YOU. And, the same God who has called you is the same God who will equip you. You can't do exactly what I do. Nor can I do what you do. But, I want to tell you, God has a job for everyone. God has a plan for every life. We would all do well to get alone with God and fix our focus on finding the will of God for our life! Too many people are JUST drawing their breath and drawing their paycheck. Both breathing and drawing a paycheck are good. But God has more and bigger for you than that. Some get up in the morning, gulp down a cup of coffee, read the funny papers, fight the traffic to work, go to work all day, come home, take an aspirin, watch the news, eat their dinner, watch a little television, and go to bed. The next day, it starts all over again. Nehemiah said, "God had laid something on my heart." If you'll listen, God will lay something on YOUR heart. I like what the Apostle Paul said, "*This one thing I do...*" (Philippians 3:13). Do you really have a goal in life? If not, why not? God has a purpose for your life, and our goal should be to walk in that purpose.
- 2. Nehemiah Found the Facts.** In verses 13-14 (look above) and verse 15, he goes on a tour of inspection. <sup>15</sup>*So I went up the valley by night, examining the wall. Finally, I turned back and reentered through the Valley Gate.* What is he doing? He's out there getting the facts. He wants to see how things really are. He's not like the ostrich that sticks his head in the sand. He's asking, "What are the facts?" Once he sees these facts, he readies himself to do God's work. What were the facts that he saw? He saw that God's work was in ruins. He saw that the walls around the city of Jerusalem, that had once been a thing of beauty and strength, a thing that had brought glory to God, were fallen down. What does that mean to us today? There are a lot of things crumbling around us. The walls of decency. The walls of freedom. I won't take the time to talk about all the walls crumbling around us. But DON'T stick your head in the sand. The facts are all around us. God wants you to be a Nehemiah. Do what Nehemiah did – go out and make a survey, and look and see for yourself what the situation is.
- 3. Nehemiah Formed a Fellowship.** He got some people to help him. Verse 17 of this same chapter – "*Then I said to them, 'You see the trouble 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.'*" Nehemiah did not believe in a one-

man ministry. He knew several things: there is strength in NUMBERS, there is strength in UNITY, and this task was BEYOND anything he could do by himself. Though God had called him to lead, he said, "Come, let's do it together." 1 Corinthians 3:9 says: *"For we are laborers together with God."* How powerful it is when we work together in unity! I was reminded of the illustration that Brother Rimmer used on Pastor Appreciation Sunday. Canadian Geese fly in a V-formation. One leg of that "V" is almost always longer than the other. Do you know why that is? There are more geese in that one leg than there are in the other. Why do they fly in a V-formation? The lead goose is making it easier for all of the rest of them. He is literally splitting a way through the air, and he is moving the wind resistance for the rest of them. While he's flapping real hard, the rest of them are cruising. That's the way they do it. BUT, after a while, the lead goose gets tired. So, he falls back to one end of that formation, and the next goose moves up. For a while, he does his part in taking care of the resistance. That's the way they travel. I read that engineers have, in their wind tunnel experiments, studied geese flying in such a formation. They found that the geese fly 72% further than one goose could fly by itself. Now, who taught them to do that? God did. What is God teaching us today? The same thing that He has put into nature. We can do more together than any one of us can do by himself. WE NEED TO WORK TOGETHER! I like the acrostic T.E.A.M. – Together Everyone Achieves More! Here's the biblical principle. The Bible says, *"One will put a thousand to flight and two, ten thousand"* (Deuteronomy 32:30). Think of the spiritual dynamic locked up in this place. What would happen if we ALL focused our energies on really doing something together. TOGETHER we build. Henry Ford was a mastermind at organization and cooperation. Here's the way he put it: "Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Thinking together is unity. Working together is success." There is something about forming a fellowship. No matter what you're doing – if you're even building your own personal life, you can't do it by yourself. The Bible says that *"none of us lives to himself alone"* (Romans 14:7). Your family – husband, wife and children – you've got to do it together. If you have a business, you need to involve those people who are working for you. Do it together – we are part of A FELLOWSHIP.

- 4. Nehemiah Fortified his Faith.** Verse 18 – *"I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me."* I love that verse. I want God's hand to be good upon me. How about you? What had the king spoken to him? In chapter 1, Nehemiah had the king's PROTECTION and PROVISION. I believe as God's children, we do too! When we are walking in obedience to the King of kings, we have His protection AND provision. So, Nehemiah is basically rehearsing what the king had said to him – how the hand of God was good upon him! Now what was he doing? He knew that they needed to be fortified in their faith. He knew human nature tends to fear the new and the unknown. Whenever anybody says, "Let us rise and do a great and noble thing," there often comes the thought, "WHAT IF IT CAN'T BE DONE?" When we purchased the house and couple of acres beyond the office, not everyone jumped on board. At the business meeting, ONE voted against it. When we were preparing to purchase the five acres behind, there was one who went to great length to tell in both word and letter that we shouldn't do it. I think the vote was unanimous, and that brother came to change his mind. I've been around long enough to know that not everyone has jumped on board in our acquiring the building next door. Twenty years before my time as pastor, there was an effort to secure that building. Several years ago, during my time here, the property went back on the market. I believe the purchase price was just over \$300,000. One brother came to me and was adamant that we buy it. I shared that my research indicated it wasn't worth that much. He argued that it was. He told me he had a realtor. I suggested he get his realtor's opinion. His realtor told him it was over-priced. Just a few years ago the building was placed on the market again. This time the price was much better. I had also been asked by a party if we would mind if they put a gambling establishment with a liquor license in there. I told him I wouldn't be happy about it. I have persons regularly knocking on the church office door asking for money. Now we'll have a building next door with "money eating machines!" And foolish people will feed these machines ALL of their money – money that would have put food in their families' mouths and clothes on their backs. Then they'll walk over to the church office, knock on the door, and ask for God's money! Anyway – God is making provision. We have secured the building. There is NO gambling or liquor establishment next door! HALLELUJAH! I believe that God has a greater purpose for that building. Anytime people of faith purpose to do something for God, the devil will see that there are challenges. But know this – if God is leading, if God's good hand is upon us, then IT CAN BE DONE! So Nehemiah turned around and reviewed the past, so that he could face the future. In essence, he said, "the God of yesterday is also the God of tomorrow." I believe God has been good to us at Marlowe Assembly. Psalm 126:3 says, *"The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad."* God has done great things! He's the God of yesterday, today, AND tomorrow. Why does God bless? Does God just bless because of a whim or a

fancy? If you want to know why the hand of God was upon Nehemiah, or why the hand of God is upon any church, you can find it in the Bible. In Revelation 3:7-8, we read about the church at Philadelphia. Why are some churches blessed? Why has God set before some an OPEN door and others seem to have a CLOSED door? Verse 7 reads – *“To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.”* Great verse! Our God is the keeper of the keys. When He opens a door, there are not enough demons in Hell to shut it. When He shuts a door, there are not enough angels in Heaven to kick it open. God is the One who opens doors and He’s the One who closes doors in your personal life, in your business, in your family, and in this church. He’s the One that opens, and no one can shut. He’s the One that shuts, and no one can open. Look at the next verse and we’ll see why God set before that church an open door. He says, *“I know your deeds”* (Revelation 3:8). Here was a church that was activated by the Spirit of God. It was a working church. God is not going to bless our laziness. God only opens doors for people who WANT to go through them. Now go down to the last part of verse 8. It says, *“...you have kept my word...”* Not only were they activated by the Spirit of God, they were saturated with the Word of God. It was a church that loved the Bible. It was a Bible-believing, Bible-preaching church. One more thing: *“...and have not denied my name.”* They were dedicated to the Son of God. They loved the Lord Jesus! You take a church that is activated by the Spirit of God, saturated by the Word of God, and dedicated to the Son of God, and God says, *“I will BLESS that church, that person, that family, that business”* – whatever it is – God says, *“I will give to them an open door. When I open that door, no one can shut it. When I shut it, no one can open it.”* I believe that’s the reason that Nehemiah had the good hand of God upon him. Anyone want God to open a door for you? Follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. Saturate yourself with God’s Word. Love and follow the Lord Jesus.

- 5. Nehemiah Faced the Foe.** Nehemiah 2:19-20 – *“But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard it, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, ‘What is this thing that ye do? Will ye rebel against the king?’ Then answered I them, and said unto them, ‘The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore, we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem.’”* He told them, didn’t he? Just so you know – here’s the way it works – whenever God’s people say, in their personal life, or in their corporate life, *“Let us rise up and build,”* all the hosts of Hell will say, *“Let us rise up AND STOP THEM.”* The door of OPPORTUNITY swings on the hinges of OPPOSITION. Don’t EVER forget that! If you think there is an easy way, a cheap way, a lazy way, to do the work of God, THINK AGAIN! The Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 16:9, *“For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.”* There are many what? ADVERSARIES! When we have an open door, that doesn’t mean there are no adversaries. When God calls us to do this thing, do you really think it’s going to be easy? Do you really think it’s going to be a piece of cake? Think again. These three wicked men were demon-inspired, and representatives of the devil himself. We, too, as believers are coming against the demonized, mobilized forces of Hell – right here at Marlowe. In just this last week, the news was full of demon activity. Know that whenever the church decides to do anything great and noble and good, there is an enemy who will say, *“Let’s stop them!”* He and his imps don’t like anything that’s built for the name of Jesus and the cause of Christ. Think of the names the Bible gives to the devil: deceiver, liar, murderer, accuser, tempter, destroyer, the evil one. What do those names tell you about the devil? It’s his character to oppose us AND the work of God. So – opposition ought not to discourage us. It ought to encourage us! I probably haven’t learned enough these past 61 years, but I have learned a few things. Many times when I come on Sunday morning, THINGS happen – I trust you know what I mean. The A/C isn’t working. The heat isn’t working. The projector isn’t working. An important worship team member is sick. The guest speaker can’t make it. There’s water in the basement. A toilet won’t flush or – worse yet – it’s run over. Or someone has given me bad news about one of our own. Such STUFF happens more often than I like. But it’s just STUFF. So we pray...we bind the devil. Here’s my confession: He has sometimes made me think – *“What’s the use!”* Now I see it a bit different. It doesn’t bother me like it used to. In a way, I’m encouraged, BECAUSE I now know the devil is upset. I’m thinking – I’d hate to be a person or a church the devil wasn’t after, wouldn’t you? If he never bothered us, wouldn’t that mean that we are no threat to him? Romans 8:31 – *“If God be for us, who can be against us?”* 1 John 4:4 – *“Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.”* Have you fixed your focus on that thing which God has called you to do? Have you found the facts? Have you formed a fellowship? Have you fortified your faith? Have you faced your foe? Don’t worry about your foe; let him be an encouragement to you. When someone says something bad about you (and they will), don’t worry about it. Criticism is much like a shadow – it can’t hurt you if you won’t let it. Besides, I’m not so sure you

can ever really escape criticism. There will be those who criticize when you do nothing. There will be those who criticize when you do something. So, if you are going to be criticized no matter what, you might as well be criticized for doing SOMETHING. There will always be a Sanballat; there will always be a Geshem; there will always be the Arabian there to say, "What do you think you're up to? What do you think you're doing?" Face your foe with faith.

6. **Nehemiah Fulfilled his Function.** Chapter 3 – don't worry, I'm not going to preach another whole chapter, but let me give you just a taste. But go home and read chapter 3 before the day is over. I want you to see the story of how they really began to build. The Bible says, <sup>1</sup>"*Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests, went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate. They dedicated it and set its doors in place, building as far as the Tower of the Hundred, which they dedicated, and as far as the Tower of Hananel.* <sup>2</sup>*The men of Jericho built the adjoining section, and Zaccur son of Imri built next to them.*" On and on it goes. So-and-so built here; so-and-so built here; so-and-so did this; and, so-and-so did that. What a WONDERFUL THING that was, as each one of them filled his function, as each one of them found his place along the wall! In getting the building next door ready, there are some of among us that have REALLY given of themselves. Our board held some long meetings in the past couple of years. There were many decisions to be made. Many times it was just plain laborious. But, as each one did their part – from working, to giving, to cleaning, etc. – the building has been finished to the point that we can now use it. God AND God's people are good. I say THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU! By the way, there are still ongoing projects! But, let me get back to Nehemiah. Now, notice under this last point, three sub-points. **THE PATTERN** – Notice how they did it. They recognized that God had a plan. Yes, Nehemiah's leadership was part of it. They recognized God's chain of authority; and they were willing to follow God's man and do as he directed. They didn't go off and say, "Well, I'm going to do my OWN thing." Each person had a job to do. NO MAN can do everything. EVERYBODY can do something. I'm only one, but I AM one. I can't do everything, but I can do something. And, what I can do, I ought to do by the grace of God. You see, here was the principle: not equal gifts, but equal sacrifice. That was it: not equal gifts. I can't do what you can do; you can't do what I can do. But notice here, EVERY MAN HAD A JOB. EVERYONE WAS INVOLVED! **THE PEOPLE** – there was a job for everyone. If you read the third chapter, you'll find that there were apothecaries, goldsmiths, and priests who were working – some of them were young, some were old, some were rulers, some were laborers, some were craftsmen, some were rich, some were poor, some were men, some were women – they were all doing their part. Here we have a mixed group of people that God used to work together. Some of them were from out of town – "*And next unto him builded the men of Jericho*" (3:2). Look at verse 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.*" There are always some like that. Some just sit back and say, "Well, if they want to do it, just let them do it. I'm not going to do it. I'm not giving MY money." Well, do you know what? It is forever written in THIS BOOK that there were certain people, when there was a job to do, they DID NOT DO IT. I pray that will never be written about you. Don't let it be written of you – "during days of opportunity – he NEVER did his part." These are days of opportunity! Don't you miss it! **ILLUSTRATION:** Some little boys were sitting around being real quiet – and that's rather unusual for most little boys – and a man asked them, "What are you boys doing?" One of them said, "We're playing war." The man replied, "You are? You're awfully quiet for playing war." The one boy said, "Well, we're all generals." Well, in this battle – we aren't all generals! We need some soldiers. We need to be involved in His battle. **THE PLACES** – here you find each one, building right near his own house. That's a wise place to start. Start with your family first. Get together with your family – and PRAY with them. Start at home – in your own heart, in your own life. Get your life straight with God. Pray – "Oh God, make my heart right! And, if nobody else does anything, Oh God, I want to be Your man. I want to be Your woman. I want to be found faithful." Find your place along the wall. Nehemiah 2:20 – here were people who were not interested in the building of the walls. Notice what Nehemiah said to them: "*The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it.*" God is always faithful to honor His faithful.
7. **Conclusion.** Could the last part of that verse be spoken of you? Do you have a portion in the work of God? Will your life be remembered when all of the dust is settled for a memorial that you served the Lord? Basically there are two classes of people in the world: Builders and Destroyers. Either you're FOR God or you're not; you can't be neutral. Jesus Christ said, "*He that is not with me is against me*" (Matthew 12:30). I'm telling you today that the God of Heaven wants to save you. Remember, the God of Heaven has a job for you. But, you cannot build without a foundation, and that foundation is the Lord Jesus Christ.