

Sonoraville Baptist Church
Sunday, March 20, 2011 – 11:00 AM
Rev. Steve Skates, Pastor

Next to Him - Nehemiah 3:1-4

Introduction: Once there were two brothers who were famous criminals. They were known thieves, gamblers, and murderers. You name it, they were involved in it.

Well, the older brothers up and died suddenly, leaving the younger brother to make funeral arrangements. Not wanting to be embarrassed at such a sorrowful time, the younger brother offered \$10,000 to any preacher who would say in the eulogy that his older brother was “*a saint.*” Well, no one would take the offer except this one young minister fresh out of seminary. He said that he’d be sure and call the older brother “*a saint*” at his funeral. And sure enough, The young minister got up, and in his opening remarks, said: “*The man who lies before us today was a liar, a cheat, a swindler, he was linked to several murders, and even ran around on his wife. But next to his younger brother, this man was a saint!*”

I hope that that is never said of you concerning the person you find yourself next to. But this little bit of humor is a great lead-in to our message for today from the book of Nehemiah. In Chapter 3, as we read this story of Nehemiah’s rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, we find a phrase mentioned quite often. In fact, 20 times, in Nehemiah 3, we read the phrase “*Next to him,*” or “*next to them.*” These phrases all speak to one of the reasons that Nehemiah’s wall-rebuilding project was such a success in the face of opposition. Without the help of those who worked “*next to him,*” it is highly unlikely that Nehemiah would have been successful. To see this phrase in the text, let’s read Nehemiah 3:1-4. These phrases speak of the cooperation of God’s people to accomplish a great task.

Nehemiah 3:1-4 (NIV) *1 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. 2 The men of Jericho built the adjoining section, and Zaccur son of Imri built next to them. 3 The Fish Gate was rebuilt by the sons of Hassenaaah. They laid its beams and put its doors and bolts and bars in place. 4 Meremoth son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz, repaired the next section. Next to him Meshullam son of Berekiah, the son of Meshezabel, made repairs, and next to him Zadok son of Baana also made repairs.*

As we come to this chapter, a little history will help us understand what is happening. Several years prior, God’s people had been taken into captivity by the Babylonians. Years had passed and the city of Jerusalem was in ruins. The great walls had been destroyed and all the gates had been burned. (1:3). Nehemiah was in a foreign land and had won the respect of King Artaxerxes to the point where he had become his cup bearer. Nehemiah heard about the destruction of the walls and gates of Jerusalem and with God’s calling, felt a burden to restore them. But it would take a miracle for this to happen. Nehemiah had no money, no power, no followers, no experience, and no human hope of pulling this task off. But Nehemiah had a burden and he began to pray diligently. For months he wept and prayed. At times he fasted. Then one day God opened the door or opportunity and King Artaxerxes gave Nehemiah permission to go to Jerusalem and accomplish this task. He also gave Nehemiah protection and some material support. The miracle had begun, but, it was by no means a sure thing. When Nehemiah got back to Jerusalem, which required a camel ride of over 50 days, he saw a devastated landscape. Not only that, there were leaders in bordering areas who were opposed to the work and they were teaming up to keep it from happening. But Nehemiah was undaunted. He had his mind made up; he was sure of his calling, so he called upon the people to join in the work and then set out.

Nehemiah 3 tells of the beginning of the work of rebuilding the walls and reestablishing the gates. As we see the work described in this chapter, we see this phrase over and over again: *Next to him,* or, *Next to them.* A God-given vision had been accepted. A plan had been developed. A God-fearing people had determined to work together to see it done. The devil wouldn’t like it, but as long as these people stuck together and obeyed God, they could not be stopped! This reminds me of what Jesus said, “*I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*”

The people stood shoulder to shoulder in order to see a miracle unfold. And today, I want to use this story as motivation so that we can see and understand that we all must do our part in order for God’s work to be accomplished at Sonoraville Baptist Church. I’m not talking necessarily about building another building, but I am

talking about we as God's people lining up behind our Savior, Jesus Christ, standing shoulder to shoulder with each other as His church and getting to work leading people to the one who can rebuild lives, and save people and families from eternal destruction.

I'm like Dr. Mike Minnix, one of our Georgia Baptist Pastors. He said he wanted his church to be a third-class church. That may sound funny, but you have to understand what he meant. He said that back during the stagecoach days, a person could buy either a First Class, a Second Class, or a Third Class ticket to ride. Now all the seats look the same on a stagecoach, so one might think that by buying a third-class ticket would be a pretty smart move. After all, a Third-class ticket holder might be seated next to a First Class passenger. But if that stagecoach ever had to climb a steep hill, the driver would bring his coach to a stop, and yell out saying, "*All First Class passengers, please remain seated. Second Class passengers, get out and look around if you want. Third Class passengers, get out and push!*"

So, if you look at it that way, I want us to be a Third Class Church. If we're going to get where we need to be in God's eyes, we don't need riders, and we certainly don't need watchers. We need workers! We need everyone to help with the work of building the kingdom of God here at Sonoraville. God's given us a work, and it's time we roll up our sleeves and get busy pushing and praying and building the wall together. It's time we stand shoulder to shoulder, next to him- next to her – next to each other.

Let me share with you some principles of doing God's work in cooperation and power. First, we see:

1. The Scriptural Principle of Working Together

Look at **Nehemiah 4:6 (NIV)** which reads, "*So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart.*"

We need to understand that there is a divine and Biblical principle of God's people working together with and for God.

In **1 Corinthians 3:9 (NIV)** Paul says, "*For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.*" Notice, he didn't say that we are God's pew sitters or God's music critics. He didn't say that we are to be God's sermon dissectors. He said we are God's fellow workers! So working for the Lord is important. That is why James told us in his book that our faith without works is dead (James 2:17).

Now, don't misunderstand me here. I'm not saying that we're saved by our works. Not at all. **Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV)** says, "*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast.*" I'm not saying we have to work to get saved, but rather that we are saved to work, not just to get to heaven. Listen to the rest of that passage in **Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)** "*For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*" We are saved to do good works. God pre-ordained that we should work for Him!

I can't say that I understand all Scripture, but I thank God that I did come to understand this principle at an early age. From the moment I accepted Christ as my Lord and Savior at age 10, I felt the call of God upon my life. Maybe it was because I had always seen my Mom and Dad working in church. Maybe it was because almost everyone I knew in my little world was somehow connected to the work of the church. I don't know. But I am so glad, and I thank God for not only saving me, but give me something to do in His kingdom. I don't deserve His salvation, but since He saved me, I don't think He deserves me sitting on the sidelines, waiting for death. He didn't tell me that I am unworthy of kingdom work. O no! He commissioned me and gave me work to do for Him. That work involves learning His ways, yes! But it also involves working with others, learning from others, being helped by others and sometimes helping others. I am a working together with God's people – the church. And I am a worker with God, Himself! What a glory and honor He has bestowed upon us.

But, so many Christians are shirking their responsibilities. They complain when they are asked to visit. They've got an excuse when they're asked to serve. They've got another priority when they are asked to help. Or they've got a case of "*stingyitus*" when it's time to give. And sometimes, Church members even shirk their responsibilities of attending church services! Can you imagine that?

Such a lackadaisical attitude about responsibilities is a violation of Scripture. We are called to work, but so often, we don't because we think of church work as a burden. But listen, being a worker with God is not a burden. It is a blessing! And, working with other believers to accomplish God's purposes is one of the greatest joys a believer can have in this life! Moving on, next let's see:

2. The Motivational Principle of Working Together

In Nehemiah 3, we notice that the work was begun by the priests. They led by example. This is a great point that all our leaders need to heed. Listen leaders...you may not realize it, but others in the church are watching you. Others outside the church are watching you too. And when they see you not doing your best, or complaining about the task or about others, they notice. And what does that say to them? It says, if they can be negative, so can I.

But on the other hand, when others see you in service, they realize that they should be as well. And your joy in working will inspire others to serve. It will motivate others to want to have what you have – that peace and joy, that love and enthusiasm that characterizes your life. They want that, and they will pursue it if they see it consistently in you.

The fact is, we never know who may be listening to us or watching us. People are deciding whether to be positive or negative in the work of God by listening to and watching those they respect. Each person here has a circle of friends. You can help or hinder this fellowship with your influence.

Look at the list of names in this chapter. Now, why do you think God would take up so much space in Scripture just to record a bunch of names that we often can hardly pronounce? I will tell you what I think. It's like Ken Payne sang this morning...God knows our name. And the Lord wants us to see that people, real people, did the work mentioned here. People, like you and me, took the challenge and met it! They influenced their neighbors, relatives and friends. They motivated one another by standing side-by-side to get this work done. They weren't professional builders. Some were priests. Some were shepherds. Some were merchants. Some were farmers. And some were housewives, but, they put the shoulders together and did the work. They didn't all do the same thing either. Some drew up the plans, some cut rocks, some lifted rocks, some mortared the rocks on the wall, and some brought water and food to the workers, but together, they all did what they could, and they got the work done.

It is easy to get discouraged when you don't have help. I think right now about our Sunday School and our Children's Church and our youth department. I know we've had some folks drop out of teaching because they've become discouraged for lack of help. But listen, our children must be cared for. Our teenagers are at a critical point in their lives. They're depending on someone to point them in the right direction and lead them to Christ. Who will take care of them? Whoever it is, they need encouragement. They need someone on the wall with them helping them. It will mean giving up a little sleep on Sunday morning to come and help, but they are worth it. It might mean giving up part of a Sunday morning worship service once a quarter, but they are worth it. In this sanctuary are dozens of people who really have no good reason why they can't volunteer to help in these ministries. In fact, Jimmy and Louise, our Sunday School Directors will take your name today and put you to work if you'll come to them and say, "Here I am, send me." Mary Pettit will sign you up today to help in Children's Church once a quarter if you let her know that you're available. Let's get up on the wall folks, and stand shoulder to shoulder helping those who are trying to do the work. Do this, and you'll be putting Satan in his place, and Christ will be lifted up, and God's people will be encouraged.

God keeps up with names. That is why they are listed in this passage. He knows who is working and where they are. Finally, we see:

3. The Community Principle of Working Together

Note in our Scripture passage that different people worked in different places on the wall. They were a community, a fellowship of believers, doing what they could to accomplish God's task. We are not all alike, but we are all in the family of God. Our personalities are not the same, but our salvation is the same, and if for no other reason, we should all be willing to work together.

You see, as God's people, we are united in Christ. We are a community of faith, and a body of believers. The Bible even calls us the Body of Christ. That means that as a body, we all have different abilities and different functions within that body. The New Testament refers to this as believers having differing spiritual gifts in the body of Christ. That means that we can't all do the same thing, but we can do our part. We can't all give the same, but we can all sacrifice in giving. We cannot all teach or sing or preach or administrate, but we can all be encouragers of those who do.

There is something all of us can do. The problem is that we leave so much to be done by so few. I read about one man who went to his doctor because he was tired. The doctor asked him why. He said, "*Doc, there are 200*

million people in America. And out of that, 84 million are retired, 75 million are in school, 22 million are employed by the Government, and 4 million in the military. That leaves 15 million to do the work! Then, there are 14,800,000 who work for state and local agencies. That only leaves about 200,000 to do the work. But then you have to count the 188,000 people in hospitals. Now you have 12,000 people left. Of course, there are 11,998 people in prison. Doc, that leaves 2 people to do the work. Now you you're sitting here listening to me talk and so that leaves me to do all the work. No wonder I am tired!"

Sometimes you might feel that you are working alone. But we're actually a community of faith. We supposed to live in fellowship with one another. That's a blessing and a responsibility. Nehemiah rejoiced to be in community of faith because he could not do the work alone! He called, the people responded, the work got done, and God was glorified.

Conclusion: Let me say just a couple of things in closing. First, the work God has called us to do here on earth is important work. I mean, the eternal souls of our families, our friends, and our neighbors are at stake. So it is imperative that we get to work doing God's work. But what makes it even more crucial is the fact that we don't have much time to do it in. The window of opportunity in getting the work accomplished is closing as we speak. Jesus said in **John 9:4 (NIV)** "*As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.*" Even Jesus' window of opportunity was short, but He accomplished all He was sent here to accomplish. He didn't fail!

The Bible speaks of redeeming the time because the days are evil. That means that time is slipping by, and once it's gone, we can't reclaim it. Like our kids learned in DiscipleNow this weekend, Life is short, eternity is not. We must do the work now!

But the other thing I want us to see is that we have the capability to complete the work God gives us to do.

Nehemiah and the people completed their work. They didn't do it because they were so strong or so smart. They did it because they gave all they had, and they depended on God for the rest. When God's people work with that kind of attitude and spirit, God always supplies the rest.

Think about what happened just a few weeks ago when Gordon County was blanketed with snow. That snow storm started out as a tiny and fragile snowflake. But when more snowflakes came along and they stuck together, what a mighty force they became. They became so strong and so forceful; they almost shut this county down.

When I think of working together with God, I am reminded that as Christians, you and I are just like that tiny snowflake. By ourselves, we're not much. We can't do much alone, but we can be mightily used of God when we bind ourselves together, using our differing abilities and talents and gifts together in concert, working for the common goal of accomplishing God's purpose.

1 Corinthians 3:9 speaks of us being workers together with God. It's not enough to just be together. You can be together in a social club. But we must work together as God's church. Because when we work together, we can do so much more than when we work apart from each other.

It's time for us to stand together, next to him, next to her, next to each other and team up together to accomplish the work God has for us to do. Are you with me? Are you with God? Then let's get to work!

(Some of the material of this message was derived from a sermon written by Dr. J. Mike Minnix of Dacula Georgia)