

Tending Walls & Fix'n Fences

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For our next series of services, I am going to speak on topics that have the goal of strengthening the church. Today, my message on Tending Walls and Fix'n Fences may sound like I'm going to speaking on resolving relationships. However, that is not today's topic. I am using walls and fences in the title because the text I am going to use is about rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem. We will take our text from Nehemiah. Nehemiah, the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes of Persia, returned to Jerusalem and found the walls were still broken down. The gates were destroyed. The city could not be secure until the gates and walls were built again.

In our day, if you have a ranch, from time to time you have to tend to the fences. If your fences fall down, your cattle wander into other people's property or onto the highway. Fences and walls are for protection and security. It may seem like a stretch, but I am going to use this story as a call for us to renew our commitment to pay down our Renovation debt. We are coming up on the end of our initial three year commitment to support the Renovation project. We need to look at where we are and what we need to do to keep our church secure for the future.

First, though, let's look at the biblical story,

The story of Nehemiah leading his people to work together to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem is a story of overcoming difficulties with God's help.

There is an old cliché that says: When the going gets tough, the tough get going. There have been many times in the Bible when the people of God faced challenges.

- Israel between Migdol and the sea, with the Egyptians threatening.
- Israel at Jericho, a walled city which seemed impossible to penetrate.
- David with King Saul endlessly pursuing him.
- Elijah with a three year drought and no food.
- Hezekiah with the Assyrian army camped outside the walls.

Yet, in all of these stories, and many more besides, God was with His people to lead them to safety and victory.

¹⁵ So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. ¹⁶ When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God. (Neh. 6:15-16 NIV)

1. Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem.

When David captured Jebus (Jerusalem) he fortified the city and named it the City of David (2 Sam 5:2). Solomon expanded the walls of Jerusalem (1 Kgs 3:1). Then, in when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed

Jerusalem, he had the walls of Jerusalem pulled down (2 kgs 25:10, 2 Chr 39:16). During the exile, the word of the walls destruction reached the ears of Nehemiah, the cup bearer for Artaxerxes, King of Persia. Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem with the task of rebuilding the walls.

It is a difficult task. Economic depression, shortage of people and equipment. Enemies on the outside did not want the walls to be rebuilt.

Walls represented the security of the city. Nehemiah went about the task of getting people to work together rebuilding the walls and the gates. Against the seemingly impossible task, the walls of Jerusalem were built in 52 days. At times, people worked with the hand on the wall, while the other hand was on their weapon.

We have the Book of Nehemiah to remind us that whenever God's people have a challenge set before them, if they will look to God and work hard together, they can accomplish great things.

Today, I want to ask that we as a church consider working together with God's help to reduce the renovation debt, to strengthen our church for the next generation. We have a little over \$2 million remaining on our debt. That seems like an impossible amount of money to pay off. However, nothing is impossible with God.

**Let us remember:
Miracles are God's business,
The Impossible is His Domain.**

Repeatedly, God has said in the Bible that nothing is impossible with God. This does not mean God will send a miraculous gift to pay off the debt. However, God can use us in ways we may not anticipate to raise the gifts that will reduce the debt faster than we anticipate.

2. Let us remember the purpose for our Renovation building project.

We are coming upon the time of the end of our initial 3 year pledge to give to the Renovation Fund. We began the renovation campaign believing God was leading us to rework our facilities so we could do the mission of reaching people and making disciples better. We need to remember why we built our "walls." We made this great effort because it was needed to help us to the mission of Christ here for the next generation.

Let's rehearse some of the things we accomplished in the renovation that helps us with our purpose:

- **Formed a new main entry** to better help new people find their way into the church from our parking lot, which was behind our church. This led to swapping the design of the church so the front of the church faces the direction most people were coming into the church. This included new restrooms in the entryway.
- **Connected all of the buildings under one roof**, which helps traffic flow and gives a better integration of our space. It also allowed us to gain some usable space which was outside of the building.
- **We relocated the nursery and preschool rooms** to near the entry to help parents with the care of their children.
- **We addressed handicapped and safety issues** throughout the church. Some of these things included having the entrance on street level for easy access by wheelchair, and having flexible seating, which allows for handicapped people to sit anywhere in the sanctuary. As part of this effort, we installed an elevator to the second floor in the old 50's education building. We also installed a real fire escape which meets fire codes. Also, we made every bathroom

ADA compliant, with the addition of a family bathroom for special needs.

- **We updated our sanctuary** so we will be able to address worship for the next 40 years with new chairs, lighting, flooring, and sound.
- **We installed LED lighting** throughout the facility. This will help reduce electric cost. It should also help reduce the cost of maintenance over the years.
- **We installed the Café Connection Coffee Bar** to help people build fellowship and encourage newcomers.
- **We remodeled the Fellowship Hall** with dividers to provide more adult Sunday School space, as well as updating the flooring and paint.
- **We relocated the office** to a smaller space so we could have more space for preschool and older adults.

The renovation has been a major effort. We sought to control cost and be wise in what we accomplished. Yet, beyond money, the renovation was really about purpose – our mission purpose. We made the renovation to be able to keep doing the mission of Christ.

3. Let us renew our commitment to pay down the wall of debt so we can Be A Light for Christ.

To help us get started, we raised initial funds and we started a three year finance campaign. We asked our church members to give a commitment to give an amount over and above the tithe in regular giving for the course of the three years. That money has helped us to make payments to the renovation and the debt.

Look at The Figures

Let us look at the figures for our Renovation Project:

Initial Project Cost: \$3,000,000

Project Cost: \$2,900,000

Current Debt: \$2,085,000.

Renovation Gifts (3 Years) \$1,056,250.

We should be encouraged that we have been able to raise a million dollars toward our debt over three years. Because we have a loan, raising a million dollars does not translate to paying off a million. Interest takes about 60% of the funds. However, we should be encouraged that we can pay down the debt faster and be able to save money by doing so.

Remember that in Nehemiah's attempt to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem there were many obstacles and difficulties. Some of the people didn't want to help. The stones that made the wall were all over the place. Their enemies kept threatening them. Yet, even with that, the people persevered until the gates were rebuilt along with the walls, and they did it in 52 days. Nehemiah says, **with God's help**, they rebuilt the walls.

By renewing our Giving

If you have been giving an amount every month, consider asking God if you should continue to give.

The more we pay off the principle up front, and the sooner we pay it, the more it saves us over the cost of the loan.

Ben showed us some figures he had worked out. Rounding off the note to 12,000 will save 100,000 by the end of the note.

If we paid a lump sum of 50,000 now, it would save the church about 87,000 over the course of the loan.

We are currently in a payment plan which is designed to pay \$1 Million over 7 years. That will not pay the whole note. We will renegotiate the loan with the current rates and have a new loan.

I would like to ask you to help me raise money to pay off the first \$1 million sooner. Let us focus not on the whole amount. Let us focus on the first million. Let see how, with God' s help, we can pay it off. Instead of the remaining 4 years on this note, lets get the first million down in 3 years. Then, as God enables, lets begin to work on the last million.

By Praying

We can ask for God to help us reach families who will help us with the mission and be able to help us with our support of the budget and the debt. Prayer is seeking for God to help us with our task.

Our task is not merely the removing of debt. Our task is the expanding of our work in God's kingdom both here and abroad. Here

as we present the gospel in our ministries. Abroad, as we send people to do missions, and as we support foreign mission works.

In Nehemiah's day, the people worked hand in hand to rebuild their wall. Let us also work hand in hand together to reduce our debt so our church will be financially secure for the future.