

Transcription of 17ID1972

Nehemiah 11

"A Place For All and All in Their Place"

November 19, 2017

Let's open our Bibles this morning to Nehemiah 11.

The first six chapters of this book are really concerned with one thing - a wall. Well it starts with a man, 700 miles away from a city he'd never seen - how God called him, how God used him, how his leadership provided the direction that God wanted to give to the nation of Israel, how the LORD worked through him and through the people in the midst of all kinds of distress and opposition. By the time you get to chapter 6:15, this wall is done in record time.

The next part of the book (starting there to the end of the book) is the longest recorded revival in the Bible. There are a few others that are mentioned in passing, but this one gives you more information and more insight than really anything else that you'll have in the Scriptures; this ongoing, generation-long revival and how it took place and what composed it, if you will.

I grew up in the 60's, in the Jesus Movement. And I taught for years over at Calvary Downey; 1500 people came every Sunday night. But it wasn't unusual to see 200 people get saved. It's not like that today. I'd like to tell you that it was. I would pray that it will be again. I was telling some of our young guys on staff, "I'm praying for revival so you can see what that was like." We need revival. It's hard to get people to go to church during the week now, let alone to get them to bring their friends or to share their faith. It's a different time. And certainly it is something that we pray for. We used to do concerts on Saturday nights at 7:00, and we'd have whatever the popular band was at the time. But more often than not (and the sanctuary could seat almost 2000 people at the time), we'd have to do a concert again at 10:00 at night - so many people showed up. It's not like that anymore. We need revival. I hope you're praying for revival because the church needs it, the world certainly needs to see it.

But here you have these long chapters of insight into how revival took place, beginning with the desire on the part of the people - both personally and nationally - to have a great love for God's Word, to repent of what they realized (as they read it) they had done in not walking with God and in having a desire to really commit themselves to Him wholeheartedly. In chapter 10, they even write it down.

"We're going to start now to do the things that we should have been doing all along. We're going to separate ourselves from the world, and we're going to go back to keeping the Sabbath." So unusual in the world, so anti-commerce, if you will; doesn't seem the right way to go, but it did to them. "We'll keep God first, and He'll bless the rest." They began to support and implement and use the Temple and the places of worship again.

Which brings us to chapter 11. We're getting closer to the end. We'll certainly finish by the end of the year. But here's the ongoing work of God's Spirit. And, because there are a lot of names here, what I'd like to do is just give you an overview of the chapter and then, hopefully, we'll send you home with some application from why we think it is here.

But we'll start in verse 1 where it reads this way, "Now the leaders of the people dwelt at Jerusalem; the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to dwell in Jerusalem, the holy city, and nine-tenths were to dwell in other cities. And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem." We have mentioned to you several times, but in 536 B.C., when the Babylonians were overthrown and a guy named Cyrus came to world power (the Medo-Persian Empire), one of the first things he did was he told the Jews they could go home (700 miles) and repopulate Jerusalem if they wanted to. Isaiah had mentioned him by name 150 years before he was born. He did exactly what God said he would. And you would think that millions of people would have gone home. That didn't happen. Less than 50,000 people actually took off in 536 B.C. to go back to that place where God had put His name. Eighty years later, Ezra would bring maybe 2,000 more. Twelve years later, Nehemiah would show up with just a handful of folks. But there had been people that had been in the land now for almost 100 years (91 years to be exact). So they had a wall. The grace of God had given them some security. There was some dignity returning to the place. But let's face it - it was a ghost town and not just the town but just everything around there. It was a wasteland. We used to do that "open the door and see all the people" (that thing with the kids? we still do that?), but there weren't any kids. There was nobody there. The place was just destitute - no farming, no industry, no jobs, very little housing, few people living in town. And so you find these pioneer folks - who have suffered for generations for their lack of faithfulness to the LORD - now finding this revival in their midst, and they were going to have to populate the city behind the walls if they were going to be productive. I'm sure that the Jerusalem Chamber of Commerce had a tough time selling land there.

Rocks would be cheap. You could have as many as you wanted. So, here's the introduction of the actions of the people committing to the LORD and wanting to do things right.

We read, in verse 1, that the leadership - the rulers themselves - set the pace. And you would expect people that were preaching or leading, that you would find them practicing what they were preaching. They were good examples. And, without any question, the leadership in the different tribes moved themselves into Jerusalem where there was really nothing there. It was a difficult life. It might have been a little safer than on the outside, but on the outside, wherever you were (and especially if you were there 100 years, almost), there were comforts and things that you owned and things that were important to you that you would have to leave behind to make this move.

Second of all, they cast lots - very Old Testament practice where the LORD communicated His will by the casting of lots before His presence by the priests. It isn't a New Testament practice. You have the Holy Spirit living in you. But this was very common. We read in Proverbs 16:33, "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD." And you find the LORD guiding His people, through that process, throughout the Old Testament - from armories to battles to marriages to purchases. So, it was very much a desire of the people to know what God wanted. And notice that everyone there was willing to say, "One out of ten of us will move into town. If the LORD puts His hand on us and marks us, and we turn up by the lot, we will move into town. We will be faithful to the LORD." And it says a lot about the commitment of the people, that they would permanently move into town and then away from wherever they settled. The other 90% would be allowed to then settle around them, if you will.

But notice, in verse 2, that there was also a group of folks - who are out of the 90% but were not chosen by lot, weren't necessarily leaders - who were moved upon by the Holy Spirit to just move into town anyway. And so notice, in verse 2, that the people had a blessing for those "who willingly offered themselves," who pulled up roots, who left any comfort behind, who went to serve the LORD because they saw the need to be established, to have the city be able to function. And so, in their calling of their hearts before the LORD, they went. We have lots of missionaries that we support, and I see the picture of the missionaries here. I don't know any of our missionaries that have it as easy where they live as you have it here. Not even close. No matter what you think of America and its politics,

there is no place in the world easier to live than here. Or more blessed. To this day. Every mission place I've ever gone, I can't wait to get home. But that isn't true of everyone. And the folks that we minister to, and we minister with, enjoy far less personal comfort and ease. They're most often away from their families for months and sometimes years at a time. But they have gone willingly because they believe God has called them, and they find themselves at a place where God greatly uses them, and it is up to us to help them and pray for them and encourage them. But you see the same thing here in terms of how the city was now going to be populated.

From verse 3 to verse 24 (good job reading all of those), there is a list of names. They begin with the people from Judah and Benjamin. The reason they are there first is when the LORD gave, through Joshua, the land to the people, Jerusalem was in the area of Judah and Benjamin; and they were faithful to stay there even through the split of the kingdoms years later. So, they are listed here along with the priests. The numbers of them (verses 3 through 9) was almost 1400 folks (1396 to be exact). They had an overseer (in verse 9) and a second-in-charge.

In the next four or five verses, there are the names of the priests and their families, almost 1200 (1192) of ministry, who are involved in the Temple worship. We were planning a dinner for the folks that are involved here weekly, in ministry. We started adding up how many folks that would be. We have about 300 people in the church here that are here every week, serving somewhere. There's a lot more if you count every other week or once a month. But just somebody who's committed to be at a service to do something - 300 people. That's a lot of folks. And then we started adding their kids and parents, and we thought we'd better get a bigger place. So, maybe in May. We're going to plan ahead - have a ministry dinner together.

And then, in verses 15 and 16, there is a list of those who (we read) ministered outside of the city. In fact, verse 16 (at the end) you'll read they "had the oversight of the business outside of the house of God." So besides those in ministry at a place where the people met with God, there were folks who were just in business - in insurance, in finance, in purchasing, in farming. Wherever they might have gone - still spiritual, still necessary - but just in a different place that God has brought them.

And then we read, in verse 17 and verse 18, about a couple of families - the Asaph family and the Jeduthun family - who were involved in the days of David already as worship leaders and overseers. And there was even a guy named Mattaniah (verse 17, at the beginning) who is the principal leader of the prayer meetings. This guy might not have been able to preach, but, man, this guy could pray. And he was just the guy in charge of opening up and gettin' people to pray. We have lots of prayer meetings here at the church. Every Saturday morning, either the men or the women pray depending on which week it is. We have missions prayer meetings every month. We have intercessory prayer groups that meet. We have a prayer chain that just carries the prayers of the people before the Lord on a daily basis. We have people over in one of the classrooms, right now, praying for you. Because we need God to move. And He said (James 4:2), "You have not because you ask not," so we're asking. And how exciting to have a Mattaniah. We need more Mattaniahs, in our midst, that would pray. And we're told that there were 284 (lots of numbers today) who were involved in the administrative areas and in these times of prayer.

Verse 19 tells us there were also some gatekeepers - some porters, some ushers, some sheepdogs - who would watch over the flock. They would park your chariot, I guess; keep an eye on the flock, watch out for wolves. There were 172 of them, led by a couple of guys who were overseeing the cares of the people. I'm glad of our ushers. We have ushers out in the parking lot making sure your car isn't stolen. And over with the kids to be sure that they're all safe. It's just the way it should be. We thank the Lord for our ushers and for them overseeing us.

And then we are told that the pastor (verse 20 down through about verse 23 or so) over all of these folks in Jerusalem was a guy named Uzzi. It's a gun in Israel. (Laughing) But it's a Hebrew word that means to be strong. And so there was a fellow, a descendant of Asaph - the worship family in the days of David - who was the overseer. I don't know if you've ever noticed, but Asaph shows up for generations. David was 1000 B.C. This is only 450 B.C. So, 550 years, and this family keeps showing up. In fact, there are a couple of families that just have a heritage within the work of God; and they are certainly one of them.

And we even read, in verse 23, that one of the king's commandments for them was that they would set a certain budget aside for the singers, a quota every day. If you happen to have read the book of Ezra, the LORD had (in chapter 7:24) informed us that the king, as this work began, gave an order that they should never

impose taxes or tribute or custom on the priests or the Levites or the gatekeepers or the singers or the Nethinim or those that worked as servants in the house of the LORD. So, even in 450 B.C., there was a non-profit status assigned to the work of God; which we still have today, and I'm thankful for it. It allows you to give and have tax write-offs. And at least you know where your money's going. So that's a good thing. But it was already issued here, and he makes mention of it again. Artaxerxes had written it down.

And then, in verse 25 down through the end of the chapter, we have a bunch of names of people who settled not in the city or not in the walls, not amongst the Temple, if you will, but pilgrims who lived outside the walls; greater danger but probably a little bit more comfortable. They would raise crops. They would be farmers. They would raise animals for sacrifice. Not second-class citizens, by the way. Necessary. You read verse 2, and you think, "Well, everybody's applauding the guys that were willing to make the sacrifice." But here are folks that are willing to serve and be a part as well because the work of the church includes not only those who work in the church but those who, out of the church, work inside the business community and all. And some are just called to labor in one place, and some are called to labor in another place.

Here's the key - wherever God puts you, you should be faithful. You will not find, in the Bible, God rewarding based on how much you accomplish. Or, by our worldly standards, how well you're known or how much influence you have. What you are only able to read in the Scriptures - in terms of God's view of your life - is how faithful you are to His calling, how willing you are to take the place where God wants you to serve. Now, I suspect that one of the reasons we have these thirty-six verses of names is so that you could be convinced, and that I could be convinced, that God keeps track of everyone and that His work, and their work, is important to Him. Look, everyone knows who Billy Graham is. They don't know your name or mine. But that hardly matters because, in the end, this is a bunch of names and places of service that deserve equal recognition, and yet they are unrecognizable to us. I mean, you might know Nehemiah's name or Ezra's name because we've read them so much. But I guarantee you, if you read through all of these names, you won't recognize anyone! You don't know who they are. In fact, I suspect if you tried to read ahead that you scanned and went, "Yeah, those are a bunch of names. I hope the pastor knows what he's doin'" (Laughing) "because there're just a bunch of names there." And I sympathize with that. But understand, look, your calling from the Lord is equally important as the people who

are well known, and His delight is in your faithfulness, not in your performance. In fact, if you go through the New Testament, you find that the Lord, when you arrive in heaven, will one day say to you (Matthew 25:21), "Well done, good and" what? "faithful servant." That's all He cares about. He doesn't ask you if you built a university with your name on it. Or wrote a book, that everyone knows you. Or were nationally known. He could care less. What He wants from you is faithfulness. And I think that, in many ways, we get these chapters (and there're quite a few of them in the Bible) where there's a list of nobodies who did most of the work, made tremendous sacrifices, and yet we don't know them at all. They're kind of like the MASH units who are in the front lines. Or the lineman who blocks for a very well-known running back or quarterback. They get all of the press; the linemen just get beat up. And the crowds cheer some, but God knows the name of everyone, and He honors the faithful. If you go to Arlington National Cemetery, you'll find rows of white crosses that represent lives that were ultimately sacrificed for our freedom - people you don't know at all. You don't know their names. You could walk around for hours, probably, but they made extraordinary sacrifices. If you go to the Vietnam War Memorial (if you lived during that time), you might be able to recognize General Westmoreland's name; he was a pretty big name at the time. But there'll be thousands of other names that you don't recognize at all. And yet here's God's record of the faithful - those who finished well, who did what God called them to do.

And the important truth about the church is the value that God places on individual body ministry - you and I taking our place wherever He decides to put us and serving there faithfully. Paul, when he wrote to the Ephesians, in chapter 4:16, said the same thing. He said, "We're just one body. Christ is the head, and the body works like this - every joint supplies, according to the effective working of God in the body to edify itself in love." Everybody plays a part. We need each other if the church is going to do well, if our influence is going to be where it should be. We need all that God has given us. And it won't work sitting at home, watching on TV. It won't work sitting at home, watching on TV (Pastor Jack talks to the cameras). (Laughing) Well, sometimes you have to be home. The body of Christ is significant in that manner. But, look, here's a chapter of unsung heroes who significantly served the LORD without fanfare and without notice. They served in obscurity. They served without applause. They never stepped into the limelight. They took their places willingly. They were part of the body. Paul spends a majority of 1 Corinthians 12 saying to the body, "The body has many members. But let's face it, there's only one body. And so you can't, if you're an

eye, say to your hand, 'I don't need you.' Or to your ear, 'I don't need you.' No. We need it all if we're going to do well, if we're going to function well." It was Peter who wrote in his first of two letters, "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4:10). So, I'm pretty sure that's why all of these names are here - so that we would be convinced that God has a plan. And unfamiliar names - I think when you get to heaven one day, here's what you're going to say to these guys, "How do you pronounce your name again?" Because I think we've probably butchered every one of them. Now I've gotten to just skipping them altogether. But God knows. Right? He remembers. There's that verse in Hebrews 6:10 that says, "For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints." Here's how you love the Lord - you take your place, you serve in the body the place that God has called you to serve from. He remembers. God remembers. God remembers. And we should see that there is a great need for body ministry. Revival, when it comes, causes the church to go forward together. People take their place. There's good motivation. We're not seeking glory or fame; we just want to see that God is glorified. And we see the desire for that.

Now here's the problem when it comes to determining where God's called you. Our flesh doesn't like to be unnoticed. So if the calling is to an unnoticed place, we, "Oh, let someone else do that." We'd rather be recognized and acknowledged, and yet, any calling of God to a place of service will meet with the resistance of our old nature. Always. This is why Jesus said (Matthew 16:25), "If you seek to save your life, you'll lose it. If you lose it for My sake, you'll find it." Because of the battle that takes place. Paul, when he wrote to the Ephesians (in chapter 6:5), to the servants, the slaves, he said, "Be obedient to your master over you, not to be a man-pleaser but to serve the Lord from your heart, to do good and to be that example of serving the Lord." It's always a battle. You remember when Zebedee's wife came with James and John, to Jesus (there in Matthew 20:20-22) and said, "Hey, can You get my sons great jobs when You take over?" And Jesus didn't talk to the mom. He turned right to the boys, and He said, "Are you able to drink the cup that I'm going to drink?" And they went, "Oh, yeah. We will drink whatever You're drinkin'." Until Jesus gets grabbed.....and then they're nowhere to be found. They're too busy saving their own necks to stand with Jesus. They're running. But they were longing for a place of great glory, and they wouldn't and weren't willing to take the place of a servant. So, they made a play to be powerful, and Jesus says to them, "It's not like that at all in the church. In the world,

everybody seeks glory. Not here. The greatest here is the servant of all" (Matthew 23:11).

So here, in the days of Nehemiah, revival had brought people to a place of willingness to leave themselves behind for the sake of serving the LORD. They are the living epitome of Colossians 3:17 where it says, "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." And notice that wherever people were put, whatever position they took, from a gatekeeper to a leader to a priest to a fellow out in business to a worship leader - whatever place they put themselves or found themselves - they found themselves wanting to just serve the LORD. A good indication, I think, of revival is when the body responds when they're asked, "Why are you doing something?" they're able to say, "The Lord has put me here. I'm here because God put me here." What a great way to be able to respond. Jesus, in Luke 14 (and I guess it's a big issue for us, always), told the story about the wedding feast, and He said, "If you go to the wedding feast, don't sit in the most honorable place. Just go sit in the lowest seat." That's hard for us to do. We'd rather sit closer to the buffet line, wherever that is. And the Lord said, "If you go sit in the highest seats and then the host comes and says, 'Hey, dude, you're sittin' in the wrong place, sit down there,' you're going to be embarrassed. Better you sit in the lowest place, and then someone goes, 'Would you come up and sit here with me?' Then you'll have honor." And the Lord used that to say to them, "Humble yourself, and you'll be exalted. But you try to exalt yourself, you're going to be humbled."

I think most of the ministries in any church are places of unseen service. Our nursery, unless you have little kids, you probably have no idea about the tens of people that work in there during every service - changing diapers, burping kids, holding little babies - while you can just be in here and not interrupted by thirty kids screaming at the top of their lungs. And I'm thankful for our nursery people. But you probably don't know who they are or their names, and some of them have been in there for 15 years; started off as moms and stayed as grandmas. I don't know if you know who goes to our prison ministry every week, but isn't it good that people go? And they go in the evening, and they work all day, and they go through background investigations - having to be checked out, and they've got to follow a lot of rules, and there're lots of restraints, and yet they can't wait to go. And the fruit is obvious. People get out of prison, they end up in church - maybe sittin' next to you, loving the Lord. But unless you have gone, you don't know who those people are. Unless you show up here during the week, I'll bet you don't know who our

janitors are. Yet aren't you glad they come and clean up after us? Or the folks that, today, after third service will be heading off to convalescent homes across the city, who spend their Sunday afternoons not watching football games but sittin' with folks that are old and abandoned and sick and need love and need the Lord. And you probably don't know who they are. Here's the lesson of chapter 11 - God does. He knows every name. He knows every activity. And to Him, it is as valuable in their faithfulness as Billy Graham has been to the church at large. Because that's the lesson here. You might not know those who cook meals for us on Wednesday once a month, but they're here faithfully. You probably don't know who the sound people are or working the video today. Unless they do something wrong, then everyone looks up there. (Laughing) It might be the most perfect ministry to illustrate getting out of the way because the only time you know them is if they do something wrong. The best job of sound guy is no one notices him at all because the sound's fine. It starts crackling, it goes out, somethin' goes bad, lights go out, "Hey, what're those guys doin' up there?" Other than that, you don't know who they are. But, because of them, the live feed goes out. We have literally thousands of people that watch every service across the country. We just got a letter from a guy in South Korea, a pastor, who listens every week. He just loves to tune in. It helps him, he says, with his English, and it helps him with his Bible studies. How cool is that?! We're going out to South Korea this morning. I don't know what time it is there. I think it's Monday. But, anyway, he listens on the archives, maybe. I can't imagine he's up. But he loves it. And because somebody's faithfully editing and working on the live feed and all the technical things that go with it - the sound crew and all - that's how chapter 11 works.

One day in heaven, I suspect that those who serve in places that are least seen will get the greatest reward. Because at least I get people during the week that will call and go, "Oh, Pastor, you're the best Pastor ever," and my wife does this, "Pfft. Yeah." (Laughing) Brought back to earth. But you get a lot of accolades. Oh, you get other things, too. People get angry with you, and they hate you, and that's fine. But most people are kind. And I'm thinkin' then there're those that just haven't heard it from anybody. They've just been faithful to the Lord. And I think they're going to get a seat at the table. Pastors will be in some tent in the outlying area watching on video, I suspect. (Laughing) But, I don't know. But it's kind of like our physical bodies. Everything that you need to do well physically is unseen. You can live without an eye or an ear or a hand or a foot. There's a lot of stuff you can lose, and you'll still make it. Your heart quits, your brain shuts down, lungs don't work - pretty much all unseen. If you see that stuff, it's not good usually. You're

just on your way out. And yet somehow we applaud the fingers and the toes, and we could care less about the things that are not seen. God doesn't look at it that way.

So here's the attitude of the people. And learn the fact God recognizes and acknowledges and keeps good records. But the revival caused the people to be willing to take those places where they were unseen just because they're only interested in pleasing the LORD. And, on the heels of chapter 10's commitment, you find the dedication of their hearts to do exactly what their Father in heaven, what their God of Israel, wanted for them. Jesus said (John 8:50), "I didn't come of My own. I came to seek glory for Him who seeks and judges." So, that's what you see in the midst of the people. And service like this will surely leave a witness behind. I always think about the first chapter of 1 Thessalonians (verses 7-8) where Paul writes to the church, and he says, "We've been all over Macedonia and Achaia, and everywhere we go, and every people we talk to, we hear about your faith towards God, and we don't need to say a word." And I think that's the way revival works. You don't have to toot your own horn. If you just walk with God, and it shows, the fruit follows, people notice. And things get done. I'm sure that most of you are saved this morning because there was someone who probably none of us knows, who ministered to you - some unsung hero of the faith that had great impact on your life. The Epaphrodituses or the Jabezses or even Barnabas. We know his name, but I think there're less than thirty verses about his entire life in the Bible. Virtual unknowns.

But here's God's calling and here's God's gift, and it's invaluable to you in the body. And one day in heaven, your rewards are going to be determined not by public applause but by your faithfulness; not by what other people think about you but what God thinks about you. And He doesn't take referral letters. He just knows. He knows all about your service already.

So it's a pretty good book. And I suspect that most of us would be happy just to find our names in this list, wouldn't we? And God wants to put us there.

Next week, more names. (Laughing) Different lesson.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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