

## “Accomplishing The Impossible”

Nehemiah 3:1-32

Series: Nehemiah [#3]

Pastor Lyle L. Wahl

Date: September 18, 2005

Theme: **God Accomplishes The Impossible Through People With Active Faith.**

### Introduction

This is our third week in the book of Nehemiah. It was written over 2,400 years ago and is still up-to-date, practical in its lessons. Nehemiah was the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes I. He was sent to Jerusalem, Judah’s governor, to rebuild the walls. In the first chapter we saw his “*Spiritual Fitness*”— he had a genuine concern for God’s work, a clear vision of the needs, a high priority on prayer, and a ready availability for God’s work. In the second chapter, “*How To Tackle A Tough Task*,” we saw that getting the job done requires active faith—praying in faith to sustain the work, planning in faith to prepare for the work, proceeding in faith to accomplish the work.

For some people coming to chapter 3, the first look might be the last look. There are lists of names, places where people worked on the walls. It’s tempting to turn the page to chapter 4! But there is much more than a list of people and parts of the wall. Nehemiah records some of the *who* and *how* of the *impossible task* of rebuilding Jerusalem’s defences in less than two months.

- The project included almost 3 miles of walls, gates and fortifications.
- It involved hard, physical labor— there was no heavy duty equipment.
- He had only a ragtag, volunteer crew of amateurs.
- They faced ongoing opposition and threats.

Getting it done in 52 days? It sounds like *Mission Impossible!*

When was the last time you were faced with *accomplishing the impossible*? Perhaps at work, school, family, church, or personally—it’s got to be done, but “It’s Impossible!” Let’s look at chapter 3 and discover more than a long list. Let’s explore principles from God to help each of us accomplish our impossible tasks. The big picture, central truth is that God accomplishes the impossible through people with active faith. Here we learn more in this chapter about active faith, which we started examining in chapter 2. The principles here helpful for everyone. Many follow them without God, and find them helpful. But accomplishing the truly impossible is God’s work, and these principles need to be carried out by faith in Him. We start with ...

### A Tour Of The Work.

Open the outline sheet and follow the map (such as it is). Nehemiah’s summary starts at the north and moves counter-clockwise. It’s difficult to locate every gate and part of the

wall. Archaeologists are still working all over Jerusalem. Maps vary a bit in overall shape as well as some of the specific points. Let's take a brief overview.

We start with the North side. Nehemiah's description begins at the Sheep Gate (1-2). It thought the sacrificial animals entered Jerusalem here. The High Priest Eliaship set an example—this work was not *beneath him*. Now we move on to the Fish Gate (3-5). These were the gates through which fisherman and merchants brought fish into the city.

Next we are on the West Side (6-12). At the Old Gate there were a variety of workers here: goldsmiths, perfumers, city officials, men and women. Moving on to the Broad Wall. Some sections studied in the last century go back to the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., before Nehemiah's rebuilding. At points walls in this area were 22' thick. Now, some of us are good at estimating distances, others not. 22'. Look at the panelling / doors below the pipes of the organ. That wall is about 26'. Cut off just a bit, and you have the thickness of those sections.

Let's move on to the South Side. (13-14). People from the small village of Zanoah, 13 miles west of Jerusalem, built the Valley gate *and* also 1500' of wall. This gate was the one which led to the valley of Hinnon (13). From there we go on to the Refuse Gate (14). The garbage from the city was taken out through this gate. How would you like to have been known as the one working on the *Garbage Gate*? A district official from about 3 miles south of Jerusalem, named Malchijah, is!

And now we complete the circuit with the East Side. (15-31). First there is the Fountain Gate and area. This was the area where Nehemiah found so much rubble on his midnight secret reconnaissance ride in chapter 2 that he had to dismount and go on foot. It also is the area of the aqueduct to the pool of Siloam, built during King Hezekiah's time for a secure water supply. Next is the Water Gate. Temple servants and people from Tekoa worked here. The Horse Gate was the commercial, official point of entry to the city, while the East Gate. led to the temple area from the Mt. of Olives. And, finally the Inspection or Miphkad Gate, where troops were reviewed.

Turn to 6:15, " So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of the month Elul, in fifty-two days." Fifty-two days from start to finish. This was an enormous task for volunteer workers with all the limitations in skills, family/regional pride and prejudice and external opposition. Certainly this was an *Impossible Task*! How did they do it? The short answer is that they did it with God's direction and provision. But not through just wishing and praying for it, certainly not passively or half-heartedly waiting for God to do it. How? *God accomplishes the impossible through people with active faith*. We see some of this fleshed out as look at ...

### **Some Lessons On Active Faith From The Work.**

We begin with a basic, organization of the task. One of the first steps or organizing a task is to break down the large impossible task into small possible pieces. Nehemiah and his staff could not have done the job alone. If they looked just at the whole project, they could have been overwhelmed, discouraged before they started. In faith, Nehemiah *proceeded*, breaking

the task into small pieces: sections of the wall, gates. *Then*, they could plan, assign, provide directions and supplies.

The same principle applies to us. We are not faced with building almost 3 miles of walls, gates and fortifications in 52 days, but we do have our own *impossible tasks*. As a church:

- *Rebuilding the walls* — not literally, but there are many projects to repair maintain this beautiful old building. Some of them are both labor intensive and expensive. How do we approach this? *Break down the task into small, manageable pieces.*
- *Rebuilding the walls* — figuratively, building up and expanding the church family. How? *Break down the task into small, manageable pieces.*
- Individually or as families. The road can seem impossibly long, the factors impossibly numerous and complex, the time frame impossibly short. Step out in faith, proceed by first *breaking down the task into small, manageable pieces.*

Then, coordinate the work thoroughly and practically. Coordinate the task—know what’s going on, keep it tied together and not haphazardly, not now and then, but *thoroughly*. The first verse of chapter three tells us Eliashib and other priests built the Sheep Gate. Then in verse 2, “Next to him the men of Jericho built, and next to them Zaccur the son of Imri built.” On through the chapter both of the phrases “next to” and “after” occur 16 times. Simply reading the description can seem “tedious and boring”, but look at the beautiful truth of *thorough coordination* pictured here. Every section was covered, every worker knew his place of work, the things for which he was responsible.

Coordinate the work thoroughly and also practically. Drop down to verse 21,

“After him Meremoth the son of Uriah the son of Hakkoz repaired another section, from the doorway of Eliashib's house even as far as the end of his house.”

Verse 23,

“After them Benjamin and Hasshub carried out repairs in front of their house. After them Azariah the son of Maaseiah, son of Ananiah, carried out repairs beside his house.”

Drop down to verse 28,

“Above the Horse Gate the priests carried out repairs, each in front of his house. After them Zadok the son of Immer carried out repairs in front of his house. And after him Shemaiah the son of Shecaniah, the keeper of the East Gate, carried out repairs. After him Hananiah the son of Shelemiah, and Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph, repaired another section. After him Meshullam the son of Berechiah carried out repairs in front of his own quarters.”

Notice the repeated theme, “in front of his own house.”

This was *very practical* coordination. There was concern for safety ... for me, my family. This inspired personal pride in work—they had a personal interest and saw it every day. Another practical note is that there was not much time spent in commuting.

Next, involve everyone in the work. Nehemiah certainly lived out an excellent example.

- He and his servants were involved (*cf.* 4:16-23).
- The High Priest (3:1) and other priests (3:22) worked.
- The rulers of the city, other cities, districts got involved.
- Goldsmiths, perfumers, temple servants jumped in.
- There were business people, laborers, farmers.

Nehemiah did his best to involve everyone. ... the only scar on this nice picture was the rulers of Tekoa (*cf.* 3:5). Large projects require large resources—enlist everyone involved who can, should and will.

The first Lesson on Active Faith is to organize of the task.

A second major lesson is to motivate the people. Both of these lessons or principles can be difficult to achieve. And so, the importance of *faith. God accomplishes the impossible through people with active faith.*

One of the starting points of motivating people is knowing them, knowing your fellow-workers and their work. Nehemiah knew *who* was working, *what* they were doing, and *where* they were doing it. Read the chapter! He didn't sit under a tree, servants fanning him with palm branches and sipping ice tea while he waited for a report at the end of the day. *He knew his fellow-workers and their work.*

With all the technology, easy and instant access to information, there are also growing expectations, more busyness, greater independence and isolation. This complicates the task, but does not excuse us from knowing our *fellow-workers* [work, family, church] and their work.

Motivation also includes encouraging and praising your fellow-workers. Nehemiah knew and remembered. More than this, he *encouraged* them in their work. He gave them a positive challenge to the work (*cf.* chapter 2). He kept on encouraging them as threats of discouragement, conspiracy and compromise constantly shadowed the people and the work, as we will see in chapters 4-6.

He also *praised* them ...

- those who made *extra effort*. Look at verse 20, “After him Baruch the son of Zabbai *zealously* repaired another section ...” He praised his attitude and work ethic.

- He praised those who did *extra work*, for example, the people from Tekoa who completed 2 sections (5, 27) without the help of their leaders.
- He *praised* all who worked. Note two examples: (1) in verse 13, people from Zanoah rebuilt the Valley Gate *plus* 1500' of the wall; (2) then in verse 14, Malchijah, worked alone at the Refuse Gate.

It is easy, even natural for many to be critical and negative, rather than encouraging and positive. Praise, even without trying to glorify God, is powerful. Sherman Rogers wrote a book about logging. When he was young man in a logging camp, one time when the boss was going away for a few days, he asked Sherman to be in charge. He asked, "What does that mean? Can I fire people." His boss replied, "Yes, and I know what you're getting at. You're going to fire Tony the first chance you get. I know he doesn't get along with anybody, he's nasty and grumbles, but he's been with me for 8 years. He's the first one to arrive and the last to leave. Nobody has ever had an accident working with him. His hill is always the safest one to work on."

Day one of *Sherman's Reign*. Where does he go first? To Tony's hill. Tony, "I guess you're going to fire me." Sherman, "I was, but ... " He went on to tell him all the good things the boss had said about him. Twelve years later Tony was head of one of the largest logging companies in the area and frequently reminded Sherman it all began the day he told him what the boss had said. That's an example of the powerful effect of praise.

Accomplishing the impossible." God teaches us through Nehemiah, and these 32 verses of names, gates, towers and parts of the wall that *He accomplishes the impossible through people with active faith*.

## Conclusion

What are the impossible tasks you are facing right now? If we knew with certainty that all our *impossible tasks* would turn out like Nehemiah's challenge of building the wall in 52 days, I'm sure we'd be excited about this. Not all of Nehemiah's *impossible tasks* ended with what everyone would call a great success. Neither will ours.

God does not promise that all the *tough* and *impossible* things in our lives are going to turn out the way you want them to, nor without pain and loss. Remember that some of the *heroes of faith*, according to Hebrews 11

"...experienced mocking and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated ... wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground."

Through their faith, they "gained [God's] approval" *i.e.*, their response and actions in those *tough* and *impossible tasks* pleased and glorified God, even when they couldn't understand what was going on.

The reality is that we will have a better perspective on, be more at peace with, and have more victories in our difficult situations when we live with the *active faith* we see here.

- Praying in faith to sustain the work.
- Preparing in faith to prepare for the work.
- Proceeding in faith to accomplish the work.
- Organizing the task.
- Motivating others to come alongside and be involved.

In the next moments of *personal reflection and response*,

- Thank God that what is impossible for *you* is not impossible for Him.
- Take those difficult tasks and situations to Him and tell Him that you trust Him to do “far more abundantly than all [you] ask or think” in these things.
- Tell God you are going to do your part, by His grace and strength, to live with *Active Faith* in these situations.

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