

Re-Building The Walls: Part #9 Nehemiah ch. 13 Keeping our Promises

By Rev. P. Michael Williamson November 15th 2009

The fall is a time when we make fires and curl up with a good book and stay inside and keep warm. When I grew up in rural England the fall was a time for bonfires and my Dad loved to burn up the leaves and debris from the garden, usually in his best suit, which would infuriate my mother. He was a pyromaniac, he loved fires. My Dad's most famous fire was at the edge of the orchard near a very large tree. Usually fires when they are left unattended slowly go out because they have no new fuel. No fuel no fire. This fire was different. That evening I went in to say good night to my parents and noticed that Dad's fire was not only still going it was going really well. I went and checked on it and realized what had happened. The next half an hour we were all running from the house with buckets of water trying to put the fire out. What had happened? The fire had found fuel and the tree had become a chimney and the fire had taken off. Without those circumstances an unattended fire will always go out.

Introduction: If the book of Nehemiah had end with Ch 12 it would have been a fairytale ending and they all lived happily ever after.....The fire would have kept burning and eventually the whole world would be ablaze with the light and knowledge of God. After all Abraham was to be a blessing to all the families of the earth, at least that was God's plan... But unfortunately ch 13 has a depressingly familiar ring. After the weeping of ch 8 and the confession of ch 9 and the celebration and dedication of the wall we would hope for better things. What happened? Nehemiah leaves Jerusalem and the old patterns of life re-emerged.

William Booth the founder of Salvation Army reminded some new recruits that they needed to bear in mind that an unattended fire will naturally go out. "You must keep it stirred and fed and the ashes must be removed." That will keep the fire burning brightly for the entire world to see.

Nehemiah discovered that the fires of devotion had gone out in Jerusalem after he had been away for perhaps as little as a year. The people had abandoned their vows. So Nehemiah, as the keeper of the fire, moved into action, "to fan into flame the gift of God..." so that the community might return to being God's people, in God's service.

1. What happened to the fire of Faith?

- Mixed marriages between Jews and Amonites or Moabites had re-emerged ... they want a share in the blessing of God. They only wanted the benefits and not the obligations of a relationship with God.
- The temple and the worship had been neglected ... a Temple store room had been turned into an apartment for a hostile enemy of the community, Sanballat.
- The temple attendance had not received the offerings the people had pledged to bring. The attendance had to return to their fields in order to make a living. This meant they had neglected their temple duties.

2. How did Nehemiah rekindle the fire?

- Nehemiah cleared out the temple apartment and restored it to its original use of storing the tithes and offerings
- Nehemiah also appointed men to receive and distribute the tithes and offering to the attendance of the temple... The main qualification that Nehemiah looked for was men of strong faith.
- Nehemiah also re-established the Sabbath, as holy to the Lord, with no trading. He threatened the merchants who sat at the gate during the Sabbath with arrest.

Spiritual decline often starts with a disregard for "giving to God". Giving simply slides down the priority list. People think they can become a reservoir of what they receive rather than a free flowing channel which God uses to direct as he wishes. But as you know reservoirs have a tendency to clog up with silt and slug. Being a free flowing channel allows God to guide and direct the resources he gives us for his purposes and for our blessing. "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

3. How do we rekindle the fire?

The God who used Nehemiah to re-build the walls of Jerusalem and restore the people to a faithful relationship with God is in the same business today. We may feel that our lives or those we love are beyond any hope of restoration. But they are not... when we place our lives in God's capable hands he is willing to restore us, re-build us, and re-engage us in ministry. That is the point of our study in Nehemiah, that we will re-ignited in our faith, both individually and corporately.

What does the focus of ministry look like here at St Paul's?

- i. **Worship**
- ii. **Mission**
- iii. **Community**

Not a smorgasbord we need to be engaged in each aspect.

But how do we keep the fires burning in each area of ministry?

We need to engage in each aspect of ministry on a regular basis It can't be once in while as we think about it or as we can fit it into our busy lives. We need to fit our lives around faith and ministry not the other way around.

i. **Worship:** We each need to engage in corporate worship. We come together to be re-connected with God through corporate confession and absolution (the reminder that God forgives us) we come together to praise God through songs, through prayer, through Holy Communion, through connection with others. Perhaps the best thing that we do together is listening for the voice of God. We can hear and discern God's voice does it sound like God is it encouraging, strengthening and up building? If it is then we can know that it is God.

Worship can also happen on our own as we read God's word and pray about our lives and situations that we can't fix on our own. Worship also takes place within small groups as we sing and praise God together as we study God's word and as we share our personal concerns to ask others to pray for our needs, it is also in the context that we can minister one to another through the power of the Holy Spirit. Worship can also take place with your family as you set aside time to pray for the family needs and concerns, as you sing and praise God together in the family setting.

Quote about worship: "If worship does not lead to the protection of the weak and the poor (justice) and to the whole relationships with others (righteousness) God hates it. Worship that does not flow into the community in streams of justice and righteousness stagnates and stinks." Eugene Peterson *Praying with the Prophets* p. Nov 6th Harper Collins 1995

ii. **Mission: wherever you go...**

Something actually has to flow out of worship in order that God finds it acceptable --- worship has to send us out into Mission... Ministry to others for others wherever we go... across the room, across the street, across the neighbourhood,

across the city, across the province, continent, world.

iii. **Community:** This can happen through Sunday worship through Sandwich Sunday of Coffee hour. Hopefully that contact leads to further contact during the week. Community is all about friendship one to another. Life is richer with friends who can share in matters of faith and can pray for our needs as we can pray for theirs. Community can also take place in a small group, which can be a safe place where trust grows and sharing occurs. Where we can seek to be accountable to each other, as well as encourage each other. We can share our failures and celebrate each others success. Community can be with an informal gathering of Christian friends for a meal, or with neighbours who attend other churches. A gathering place where you encourage others and you are encouraged. We actually have 13 small groups meeting Mon-Fri you should be able to find one that works or we could always start another one.

These are not goals in and of themselves they are a means of being connected fully with God to continue "to fan into flame the gift of God" within our lives. To keep the fire of faith from slowly going to embers after which it slowly goes out.

Worship Mission and Community are all means of keeping the home fires burning brightly for God so we stay fully connected to God ---- through worship through serve and through growing community. --- to have loving fellowship with the Lord. It is not to keep us busy but to keep us in close fellowship with a God who desires more than anything else to know you as you can be fully known... Because he loves, he loves you, he loves you.

What are the consequences of our worship?

What are the consequences of our mission?

What are the consequences of our community?

We can pledge to God what we would like to do but the best thing we can do is accept the offer that God has made to us. Luke 11 the gift of H.S.

DOES GOD WANT TO EMPOWER US? What do you think? **COME HOLY SPIRIT.** Does God want us to be more effective in the world? **COME HOLY SPIRIT.** Does God want us to have an impact on our neighbourhood? **COME HOLY SPIRIT.** Have more impact on our neighbours, our communities? What do you think? **COME HOLY SPIRIT.** We need more of you Lord. **COME HOLY SPIRIT COME.**

God of whom we worship take every hymn and song we sing to you, every offering we make to you, every word we say to others, every act of faith we share, every act of worship we direct to you and shape them into acts of justice and righteous relationships so that we may work in the world in and through Jesus Christ. Amen
COME HOLY SPIRIT COME.

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Introduction: If the book of Nehemiah had end with Ch 12 it would have been a fairytale ending and they all lived happily ever after.....

William Booth: "You must keep the fire stirred and fed and the ashes must be removed."

Nehemiah discovered that the fires of devotion had been reduced to glowing embers in Jerusalem.



Nehemiah as the keeper of the fire, moved into action, "to fan into flame the gift of God..." so that the people might return to be God's people, in God's service.

1. What had happened to the fire of faith?

- Mixed marriages re-emerged ...
- The temple had been neglected ...
- A Temple store room had been turned into an apartment for Sanballet.
- Giving neglected...



2. How did Nehemiah rekindle the fire?

- Nehemiah cleared out the temple...
- Nehemiah appointed trustworthy men....
- Nehemiah re-established the Sabbath....

3. How do we rekindle the fire?

I. Worship

II. Community

III. Mission

We need to engage in each aspect of ministry on a regular basis

