

NEHEMIAH'S NEIGHBOURS ... (Neh. 11:1-12:26)

“Do you remember the name of the man and his wife who were members here for years? He was a deacon, and she was a Sunday School teacher, and they came from along the road ... Can you remember what you call them? ... Do you remember his name? Do you remember her name?”

You are thinking, “What is he talking about?! He could be talking about a whole host of people” ... I wonder how many members of this congregation there has been since it began in 1900? I guarantee if you go through the Minutes, you will be able to count them all, and find out every one of their names.

“David, why would we want to do that?!” ... For the same reason these names were recorded in the sixty-one verses of Neh. 11:3–12:26. Nehemiah has already documented lists in chapters three, seven, and eight. If names were not important, they would not have been included. So, these people *are* important to God ... But why ought we to be considering them? What significance do they have for us? Here is why ... we find them in God’s Word, and **II Tim. 3:16** All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. ... All Scripture, and that includes the genealogies. Granted, not all Scripture is equally applicable but all of Scripture is God-breathed, even the genealogies. ... How we must beware of the liberal or the flippant attitude which judges God’s Word rather than allowing God’s Word to be our arbiter.

Let’s read from Nehemiah 11 where we learn of how God needed people to live in Jerusalem, **11:1** And the rulers of the people dwelt at Jerusalem: the rest of the people also cast lots, to bring one of ten to dwell in Jerusalem the holy city, and nine parts to dwell in other cities. **2** And the people blessed all the men, that willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem. **3** Now

these are the chief of the province that dwelt in Jerusalem: but in the cities of Judah dwelt every one in his possession in their cities, to wit, Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the Nethinims, and the children of Solomon's servants. ⁴ And at Jerusalem dwelt certain of the children of Judah, and of the children of Benjamin. Of the children of Judah; Athaiah the son of Uzziah, the son of Zechariah, the son of Amariah, the son of Shephatiah, the son of Mahalaleel, of the children of Perez; ⁵ And Maaseiah the son of Baruch, the son of Colhozeh, the son of Hazaiah, the son of Adaiah, the son of Joiarib, the son of Zechariah, the son of Shiloni. ⁶ All the sons of Perez that dwelt at Jerusalem were four hundred threescore and eight valiant men. ⁷ And these are the sons of Benjamin; Sallu the son of Meshullam, the son of Joed, the son of Pedaiiah, the son of Kolaiah, the son of Maaseiah, the son of Ithiel, the son of Jesaiah. ⁸ And after him Gabbai, Sallai, nine hundred twenty and eight.

Nehemiah has a purpose in recording these names. On a basic level, the existence of these lists reminds us to establish orderly patterns among God's people, as Paul also instructed, **I Cor. 14:40** Let all things be done decently and in order. That is how God does it, and we ought to do it too.

Also, these names indicate Nehemiah did not cultivate a one-man ministry. He did not take on to do everything himself. Neither did he insist his way was the only way, but instead, he confidently entrusted the task to each of the workers. In this way, they were all involved ... and every name on those lists identify a faithful worker doing a tremendously important and personal task.

You have heard of James Wishart (1845-1917)? There is a plaque to his memory on your way into the church. He was a deacon and a treasurer. He was also President of the Baptist Union and a highly respected wealthy industrialist. (<https://wishart.org/index.php/notablewisharts/james-wishart-industrialist-philanthropist/>)

... Have you heard of Alexander Currie, or John W. Gilbertson, or William G. McGaig, or William McGlashan, Bernard O'Brien, Daniel Dryburgh, or James McCormac? ... Those names are displayed in the frame, above and to the left of the memorial to James Wishart. They were also connected to this church and died during the First World War. I don't know anything about them, but God knows them all by name, and everything they did.

Such records are precious, and every name on these lists in Nehemiah chapters eleven and twelve was known to God. They were the 'unsung heroes' many have forgotten. Each of them received a task to do in the rebuilding of Jerusalem, and they did it to the best of their ability. They knew their responsibilities and what they were capable of, and in the execution of their work, they worked alongside each other to achieve the goal. These 'ordinary' people could not be done without for ordinary jobs and ordinary folk are often of *extraordinary* significance! ... Week after week, they carry on the same necessary work, and we are grateful for those who continue their legacy here in the fellowship, ... it is how we ought to serve.

Once again, who were these people in Jerusalem? ... They were people from different backgrounds working together for the glory of God and His kingdom. None was better than the other, and none was looked down upon. They were not involved in the project to be seen. Neither were they working to have their names recorded so they could boast about it. In fact, Jesus warned His disciples about the Pharisees, **Mt. 6:2** when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. ... We are not saved to glory in ourselves, but we are saved to glory in *God!*

... How many of the ministers of this church can you name? ... Bill Turnbull, John Thomson, Thomas Stirling, Stanley Thomas (1950-56) ... Can you remember any more? ... but God never forgets, and He has all the records of how we have used for Him the talents He has given us. You might be one of those who think you have not done much, however, what you *do* for the Lord faithfully and earnestly, He receives it graciously. ... “Is He satisfied, is He satisfied, is He satisfied with me? Have I done my best? Have I stood the test? ... Am I all that I should be? Is He satisfied with me?”

Let’s look to see the kind of people recorded here. Nehemiah has already told us, **7:4** Now the city was large and great: but the people were few therein, and the houses were not builded. The reason there were ‘few therein’ was because there was a lot of work going on in Jerusalem, and not many people wanted to live there. After all, who wants to live on a construction site! Most of the folk preferred living in the towns and villages on the outskirts ... **11:1** And the rulers of the people dwelt at Jerusalem: the rest of the people also cast lots, to bring one of ten to dwell in Jerusalem the holy city, and nine parts to dwell in other cities. ... Only 10% lived inside the city walls.

The first group of people who chose to live in the city are mentioned in verse two, the people blessed all the men, that willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem. They ‘willingly offered’, - they volunteered, they chose, they decided, - to live in Jerusalem. They were not forced to, nor paid to live there ... they *wanted* to! Why did they want to? Simply, *they did!* That is where their heart was, and they were witnessing to the other nations around them, - and to Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem, - “we are here and we are for staying for this is the city of God and we are His people”. They are to be commended for looking out

of their windows every morning and seeing the work needing to be done around their own ‘front doors’. It did not ‘put them off’, instead it ‘spurred’ them on. They were the descendants of Judah and Benjamin ... the two tribes who remained with Rehoboam, while the other ten followed Jeroboam five hundred years earlier. The people from those northern ten tribes integrated with the invaders from Assyria, but the tribes of Benjamin and Judah remained distinct. God was keeping His 468 ‘valiant men’ living and stationed in Jerusalem. This first group of people were able to say, I dwelt there (v.2).

The second group would tell you, I worked there, ¹² And their brethren that did the work of the house were eight hundred twenty and two ... What were each of the 822 doing? We are not specifically told, but whether it was a ‘large’ work or a ‘small’ work, these 822 were collectively identified as ‘workers’. Some of them would have been well-skilled. Some of them were learning, and others had never done anything like this before. They worked different ‘shifts’. Some were involved with heavier tasks while some did the planning and supervising and inspecting. This was a workforce doing the job together, doing it as unto the Lord.

I dwelt there (v.2), I worked there (v.12) ... I served there, ¹⁶ And Shabbethai and Jozabad, of the chief of the *Levites*, had the oversight of the outward business [*external affairs, the outside work*] of the house of God [*cf. v.11b, 16,22*]. They were the priests ministering in the temple, particularly set apart for the service for God. However, who were they, for none of their names ‘stand out’?! None of them are mentioned outside of this context, and yet, they were important for they did the work required of them. The majority of them would have worked ‘behind the scenes’ ... like Zechariah, John the Baptist’s father, over four hundred years later. Zechariah was one of about 20,000 priests at that time He was ‘nothing special’, and we never would have heard of him,

were it not for him being John the Baptist's father. That's how most of these priests were, simply ordinary men getting on with the mundane tasks without being noticed. However, their work was necessary for the service in and around the temple depended upon these 'unknowns'. They knew they had a purpose God had called them to. They were doing His work, not to be seen, but because they were faithful and steadfast. God had called them to serve Him there ... whether it would be 'up at the front' or serving somewhere 'in the shadows.

The fourth group would tell you, I was praying there, ¹⁷ And Mattaniah the son of Micha, the son of Zabdi, the son of Asaph, was the principal to begin the thanksgiving in prayer. God's work needs prayer for nothing is accomplished to His satisfaction without prayer. We do not achieve results for God in our strength or ability, but in His. ... What can you pray for? ... Simply look around you ... Pray for the pastor, for his studies, his conversations, the wise use of time. Pray for those who work in various aspects of the fellowship. Pray for each other, - whether you 'get on' with them or not for we are all part of the one body. Pray for a world which is heading towards an abyss, and it does not realise it! God promises in His Word He hears every prayer we pray. He is waiting, and ready, and willing to listen and answer. Never doubt the place and power of prayer, - if you are not in the habit, come along on a Thursday afternoon and meet with us and speak to the God Who listens and understands all about us. Yes, of course you can pray at home, but it is an encouragement to hear you pray for me and my work, for the church and its witness, for its future. Be like these priests who remained in Jerusalem to uphold the work in prayer.

The fifth group would tell you, I was on the gates, ¹⁹ Moreover the porters, Akkub, Talmon, and their brethren that kept the gates, were an hundred seventy and two. It might not sound important, but it was for it was very practical. They watched the entrances and the exits, - the

gates going in and out of Jerusalem. They saw who was where and what they were doing. If anything was amiss, they were ready to deal with it. And they were the porters and the janitors ... called out 'at all hours' to do all types of duties, and they did them!

The sixth group would tell you, I was singing there, ²² The overseer also of the Levites at Jerusalem was Uzzi the son of Bani, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Micha. Of the sons of Asaph, the singers were over the business of the house of God. ²³ For it was the king's commandment concerning them, that a certain portion should be for the singers, due for every day. ... The Jews loved their music, evidenced by the Psalms. They had songs to sing, about all God had done for them. They would not have returned to Jerusalem, but for Jehovah ... and the city, and the temple, and the walls would never have been built ... Besides, what good would a city and a temple and a wall be if God had not brought His people back to inhabit the city He had given David and to the land He had given Abraham. The priests sang such glorious hymns as ... **Ps. 145:1** I will extol thee, my God, O king; and I will bless thy name for ever and ever ... **Ps. 48:1** Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. ² Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion.

What were their names again? ... It does not matter! We don't know what they looked like, what they wore ... but it does not matter, instead, we remember their faithfulness. Do you recall all the names of your Sunday School teachers ... probably not them all, - maybe one or two, - but you are living today with the great truths they taught you, and that is what really matters. ... D.L. Moody was a teenager in the storeroom of a shoe shop in Boston when someone walked in, put a hand on his shoulder, and began talking to Him about Christ and his need for the Saviour. Moody had never met this man before in his life, and he later

recorded, “How strange. This man never saw me till a few days ago, and he is weeping over my sins. I never shed a tear about them. ... I don’t remember what he said, but I can feel the power of that ... man’s hand on my shoulder ... It was not long before I was brought into the kingdom of God.” ... We have all heard of D.L. Moody, but few of us have heard of Edward Kimball, the Sunday School teacher who spoke to Moody, and shortly afterwards he was saved.

There are not many ‘D.L. Moody’s’ ... the most of us are more like Edward Kimball, - the ‘unknowns’ ... and yet, Edward Kimball is the man in God’s book of remembrance who He sent to speak to Moody, and through Moody thousands of souls were saved.

You might often wonder about your contribution to the Lord’s work, - how much you give Him by way of your service. It is important you *do* give Him, - and you don’t hold back from giving Him. Each of us are made partakers when He saved us and, - like the three servants Jesus spoke about in His parable, - each of has a duty to serve in whatever area He has opened up before us. Never do our efforts for Him go unnoticed, even though sometimes we might appear to be working in obscurity. We might not see the results of our work ‘this side of eternity’ but be assured His Word teaches, [Heb. 6:10](#) God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. God does not forget. Each of the names listed by Nehemiah accomplished a purpose for which they were returned to Jerusalem. Not everyone could be doing everything, but the job with which everyone was tasked was important for the work to continue. ... God has saved you to serve Him, and as a member or friend of this church, there is much work to do together here.

God was gradually achieving His plan among His people in Jerusalem ... building piece by piece as they laboured together. In a similar manner, may He also confirm His purpose among us, building us up so our witness would prosper in and for His name. Amen.