

“NOW THE REAL WORK BEGINS” **Nehemiah 7:1-7**

An old farmer frequently described his Christian experience by saying, “Well, I may not be making much progress, but I’m established.” One spring when hauling some logs, his wagon wheels sank down to the axles in mud. Try as he would, he couldn’t get the wagon out. Defeated, he sat atop the logs, viewing his situation. Soon a neighbor who had always felt uncomfortable with the farmer’s worn out testimony came along and greeted him, “Well, Brother Jones, I see you’re not making much progress, but you must be well content because you’re well-established!”

That farmer was well satisfied with where he was in his walk with Jesus. (If we are not careful, we too, can become like him. The seventh chapter of Nehemiah reveals to us the need of never growing satisfied. Nehemiah 6:15 tells us the wall was completed in fifty-two days! What a mighty accomplishment. It would had been easy to sit back, relax, and gloat over the accomplishment, especially in the face of the difficult circumstances they faced. However, the story continues in chapter seven. In fact, the first few verses show us that now the real work starts. The wall was a one time project. Now the ongoing ministry begins.

This brief section of Scripture has much to say to the modern day church of the Lord Jesus Christ. It shows us what our ongoing work is to be. Let’s look together at Nehemiah seven at the subject, “Now the Real Work Starts” and see the work the Lord would have us to be about.

1. EDIFICATION OF THE FELLOWSHIP

One of the ongoing works for any ministry is to edify the fellowship. Edification is the result of proper doctrine. The church is protect itself from any false doctrines that may seek to come in to the fellowship. The idea of protection is seen in the establishment of the ministry of the gatekeepers. Their job was to protect Jerusalem from any harm entering in to it. Nehemiah instructed the gatekeepers not even open the gates of the city until “the sun is hot.” Normally the gates would be opened at dawn and close at dusk. Nehemiah told the gatekeepers to be cautious because the enemy was lurking and looking for a way to get in.

This is similar to the warning the Apostle Paul issued to the church at Ephesus. Paul was on his way to Jerusalem and sent for the elders at Ephesus to meet him at Miletus. He instructed them in Acts 20:28-30,

“Be on guard for yourselves, and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which he purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them” (NASB).

A recent survey to churches in America included the statement: “The only way to heaven is through Christ.” Five years ago the average percentage of congregants who agreed or strongly agreed was 97%. The average for the most recent year was 83%. Some surveys indicate that as many as 1 in 5 evangelicals believes there are ways to heaven outside Jesus. This is inspite of what Jesus said in John 14:6. We have a growing number of people in the church today who believe Oprah more than Jesus..

Sound doctrine is what lead to the strength of the early church. We read in Acts 2:42 that the early church was “continually devoting themselves to the apostles teaching [doctrine]. True biblical doctrine leads to people being born again, people maturing spiritually resulting in behavioral changes and living holy lives. The goal of every ministry should be the witness of changed lives.

The church needs to be protected against any false doctrine that attempt to creep in to her.

2. EXALTATION IN THE FELLOWSHIP

Nehemiah next appointed the singers. Their responsibility was to lead and encourage the Jews to exalt the Name of the Lord through worship.

Music is a powerful tool. It is an integral part of our lives. Everywhere we go we are surrounded by music. We are surrounded when we shop for clothes, eat at a restaurant, pump our gas. Satan has warped the music of the world. Aristotle said, "Music has the power to shape character." That is exactly what is happening in the world today. The world's music is shaping ungodly character. The question is, "Is the opposite happening in the church today? True worship, exalting the Name of the Lord through song, shapes character! True worship stimulates our love for the Lord resulting in joy.

The word "sing" shows up 119 times in the KJV.

Listen to Psa 47:6, "Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises (KJV). The word "sing" is mentioned 4 times in this 13 word statement!.

Psalm 98:4 says, "Shout joyfully to the Lord all the earth; break forth and sing for joy and sing praises."

Psa 81:1, "Sing aloud unto God our strength: make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob" (KJV).

Col 3:16

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (KJV).

Eph 5:19, Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (KJV).

Singing and praise brings us into an awareness of the presence of the Lord. 2 Cor 3:17 says, "Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (KJV).

3. ENCOURAGEMENT OF THE FELLOWSHIP

Nehemiah appointed the Levites to serve. Their responsibility was to assist the priest in their duties before the Lord. Others would be encouraged as they observed their ministry.

One of the great encouragements we have is viewing others in their service to the Lord. It encourages us to get involved. As we look around the church we see many serving the Lord.

Early in my Christian life I our church used many different instrumentalists. I watched those being used of the Lord play piano, organ, keyboards, guitars, bass guitars, drums, etc. We had a Minister of Music that believed in using the talents the Lord brought to the church. I too was encouraged to get involved playing bass guitar.

My Christian life exploded in those days as I found myself with others being used of the Lord. We prayed together, prepared together, performed together, had Bible studies together, served together. Their service encouraged me.

4. EQUIPPING OF THE FELLOWSHIP

Nehemiah placed "Hanani, [his] brother, and Hananiah the commander of the fortress, in charge of Jerusalem." He placed in own brother in charge. Was this because of personal favoritism? Was it a personal power trip? No. Hanani had proven himself to be a godly leader who had a passion for the work of God. Remember, it was Hanani who traveled all the way to Susa to tell Nehemiah about the condition of Jerusalem (1:2). Close relationships should not disqualify someone from assuming leadership status in the ministry of the Lord Jesus.

Hananiah also had godly qualifications which are listed in 7:2.

Leaders are called to equip the saints for the ongoing work of the ministry. (See Ephesians 4:11-13).

5. EXPANSION OF THE FELLOWSHIP

7:4 says, "Now the city was large and spacious, but the people in it were few..." Then Lord intends for His house to fill up through growth. The facts reveal that the American church is not growing. "From 1990 to 2000 the US population grew from 248 million to 281 million a 13% increase. In the same period worship attendance grew by slightly less than 1 percent. The church is a long way from keeping pace with the population growth."

It now takes 85 church members a year to reach one person for Christ. And fewer than 15 percent of church members indicated that they had shared with someone how to become a Christian in the past twelve months. And more than 8 of 10 churches are either declining or growing less than their community." (Rainer, Breakout Churches, p. 73-74.).

Question: When is the last time you have shared your faith with someone who is lost? God says, "the city was large and spacious, but the people in it were few." It breaks the heart of God when we are not seeking to fill his city up.

Question: Are you being equipped? Are you taking opportunity to be discipled through Sunday School, Discipleship Training, all worship services, etc.? I want to encourage you to take advantage of the opportunities afforded you through this ministry.

Question: Are you being an example to others who come in to this church through the ministry God has you involved in? Are you involved in active service for the Lord making an impact on lives?

Question: Are you one who expresses and experiences joy through worship and "singing" to the Lord? Are you contagious?

Question? Are you guarding the fellowship? Is your belief system built on sound biblical doctrine?

Do you see what God is showing us here? Again, it is a review of our purpose.