

# Chosen as a Workman of the Lord

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[ 0 : 00 ] Now in this chapter that we read from Nehemiah, we find Nehemiah and his colleagues attempting to build up the kingdom of Judah.

Now you could say, well, they're not really building the kingdom, they're just building a wall. But of course, this is part and parcel of the work of building back up God's kingdom. To keep what little still remained of the old foundations and to build upon them.

And not to sweep away and begin afresh as though somehow the new generation of Israelites had superior knowledge or spirit than those who had gone before.

And the scripture says, of course, in Proverbs 22 and verse 28, remove not the ancient landmark which thy fathers have set. And the foundations and ruined piles of stone still testify to where once the city of God had stood, the holy city, Jerusalem.

But Nehemiah and his colleagues sought rather to keep the old foundations and remnants and strengthen them and rebuild for a new generation.

[ 1 : 09 ] Now, of course, they were building a physical wall of stone, a defensive perimeter for the holy city. And we know that the kingdom of God is not of this world, it's not a carnal, but a spiritual kingdom.

Nevertheless, the manifestations, the symptoms, if you like, of that kingdom, the symptoms of its presence amongst us are physical, material, tangible.

As, you know, for example, the pylons that stride across much of the mainland, for example, and the light bulbs and switches and cookers and heaters of our homes are evidence of the integral part in our lives which is played by invisible electricity.

So the material symptoms of God's kingdom amongst us are manifested in physical ways. We have church buildings, for example, that characterise and shape the physical ambience of our towns, our villages and our islands, testifying to the presence of a worshipping community in the midst of the people.

We have the physical helps of Bibles and sound books and a host of other Christian resources. But when these resources become, or if these resources become disused and decay, or when, as happens elsewhere, those distinctive church buildings become nightclubs or restaurants or warehouses or just plain derelict, that too sends a message to the world and to God.

[ 2 : 57 ] It is a common and rarely challenged assumption that the decline and the ultimate death of the church of Jesus Christ is an inevitable certainty, borne out by the very symptoms of decline which we have just mentioned.

People have been saying this, you know, even in church circles, you know, at least since I was a boy, although admittedly in church circles it would usually temper with a suffrage, you know, unless we do something drastic.

You know, notice how man likes to always put it, unless we do something, unless it's down to us to make something happen and to change how things are, rather than upon the work of the Lord and his spirit.

But, you know, the decline and death of the church as witness was just accepted. It was taken as being inevitable. But then, of course, they said that too in the 18th century, you know, with all the new ideas of the so-called enlightenment and how morality was at an all-time low and so on, and people were ready to be denying any supernatural content.

Even in the midst of self-evident revivals, which were supposedly just, oh, that was just mass hysteria, that was just evidence of psychological disturbance amongst a whole group of people at the same time.

[ 4 : 12 ] They said it also after the First World War, that the bloodbath and the slaughter was proof there couldn't possibly be a God of love and the church was doomed.

And yet revivals were known in the 1920s and 30s. And then after the even greater slaughter of the Second World War, aside from the fact that, you know, the National Church, for example, in Scotland in the post-war decade, gained an all-time high of mass membership and involvement and influence.

Well, certainly that wasn't quite as spiritual as perhaps it might have been. And it was perhaps not quite as driven by the spirit as maybe it should be.

It was also a time of revival on the Long Island in the 50s and so on. Okay, that's still half a century ago. Seems like ancient history to some of us. But it's comparatively, recent, this way.

By the relentless logic of the world, none of this recovery, none of this reviving should have been happening. All it simply serves as is evidence from comparatively recent history that no amount of decline or decay in the kingdom of God is inevitable.

[ 5 : 28 ] Much less is it irreversible. By the relentless logic of the world, the Church of Jesus Christ should have ceased to exist in this country 80 years ago.

But she is not dead. Nor is she merely waiting to die. You see, the world with its cold logic of unbelief sees only the outward manifestations, the physical symptoms, outward shells, which it assumes to be empty receptacles.

But like the pylons we mentioned a little while ago, and the light switches and cookers and so on, all of which make no sense unless there is, in fact, the invisible power of the electricity coursing through that.

And so likewise, the churches we attend, the Bibles we read, the psalms we sing, the work we undertake for the kingdom will be both senseless and meaningless, were it not for one supernatural fact, which the world needs must ignore.

It either has to ignore it or else it has to believe it. And that is the true reason why the Church of God just does not die. We find that in Psalm 46, verse 5.

[ 6 : 51 ] God is in the midst of her. She shall not be moved. God shall help her. And that right early. As perhaps we're more used to seeing it in the metrical version of God in the midst of her.

Well, nothing shall hardly move. The Lord to her and help her will. And that right early proves. You see, the point is not that the Church may appear to be struggling. The point is that by the world's reckoning, she ought to be dead.

And nobody can understand why she isn't. Now, what we see in our own country, we can also multiply in other countries. We can think in terms of India. You know, there would have been a time when people would have thought that, well, when British immigrants were removed from India, surely that's going to be the Church is going to then disappear.

Because it was really just sort of a foreign religion. It was really just sort of imperialism that was made in the presence of Christianity there. Leave aside the fact that there had been a native church in India since the time of the Apostles.

Almost certainly St. Thomas was used of the Lord to plant the church there in the time of the Apostles. And it's been there that long for like 2,000 years. But leave that aside.

[ 8 : 03 ] What has happened in India is that the Church has increased and grown since the time of India's independence in the 40s. Likewise with China when all the missionaries were expelled from China in the 40s and 50s.

And they thought, oh, well, that's the end of it now. Not a chance now for the Church. And it has just exploded there. And in all parts of the world where it ought to be in decline, the Church is in fact in growth.

Now, of course, we can't say that Church is going on in leaps and bounds in this land, in this country. But the point is not it's weak and struggling. The point is that by the world's logic it ought to be dead.

And it ought to have been dead years ago, decades ago. And nobody can understand why she isn't. This, then, is the plight of our postmodern situation.

And lo and behold, we find it here in Scripture already. The Bible describing the same situation. The Word of God, of course, being way ahead of us as usual. Here is Nehemiah and a handful of willing souls.

[ 9 : 10 ] Retiring to their duties and to their God. To the duties of their God and His Church. Here they are, set about by enemies all around, who would both mock and seek to disrupt their work.

Verses 1 and 2. In other words, how dare these Jews.

They assume that the ruined state of Jerusalem is ever to be reversed. How dare they suggest that the decline which we, their enemies, had assumed was terminal is, in fact, only temporary.

What nonsense is this? It cannot last. Now, Tobiah the Ammonite was buying when he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, it shall even break down their stone wall.

So, to whom did the Israelites go? Well, we have it here, verses 4 to 6. Hear, O our God, for we are despised.

[ 10 : 25 ] And turn their reproach upon their own head. Give them for a prey in the land of captivity. And cover not their iniquity. Let not their sin be blotted out from before thee.

For they have provoked thee to anger before the builders. So built we the wall. And all the wall was joined together unto the half that are off.

For the people had a mind to the work. But if we then go on to read verses 7 to the verse 18, where we stopped, you know, we see that the danger does not diminish.

Just because they encourage themselves in the Lord and just say, Right, we're going to carry on, we're going to build the wall. The danger doesn't diminish. And it doesn't go away. And all the threats to the peace and safety of God's people, they don't decrease either.

Rather, that increases. So what then do the people do? Do they fear? Well, yes, they are afraid. Do they run? Well, no. And one reason they do not run is because there is, quite simply, nowhere to run.

[ 11 : 31 ] Verse 12 makes clear that other people fled from the surrounding country into Jerusalem, into them. Verse 12 came to pass. That when the Jews which dwelt by them came, in other words, came into Jerusalem, they said unto us ten times, from all places when she shall return unto us, they will be upon you.

They fled into Jerusalem, but they themselves had nowhere to run. And quite often you will find in the Christian life, when we are uncertain which way to go or what it is we should do, the Lord in his mercy takes away the agony from our decision making.

By boxing us into a corner whereby we have nowhere else to go. And nothing else we can do but what he would have us do.

And we know it must be his will because he prevents us from being able to do anything else. So, what did they do? Well, we see that they strengthened themselves in God. Verses 14 and 15, we read, They stirred from themselves in God.

We see the greater the danger, the more grimly and determinedly they prepared themselves. The more alert they became, the higher the price they were prepared to pay.

[ 13 : 13 ] And the more accustomed they became to doing the Lord's work under the constant threat of attack from the enemy. They diversified their operations.

They divided the task. They divided the tasks. They divided the tasks. Some to labour, some to hold weapons, some to do both. And we see that described there in the verses that follow.

But at no time did they cease from the work of the Lord and the task of building. I'll say that again.

They diversified their operations and their work and their tasks.

some holding weapons, some doing the work, some doing both but at no time did they cease from the work of the Lord and the task of the building friends, the church of Jesus Christ in this country indeed, in this island is comparatively small and her witness is regarded by the world as a matter of indifference or worse her obedience is miscalled or legalism, her decline exalted over by worldly enemies, her saviour's holy day trampled on the foot even by some fellow Christians, there is nowhere to run but as verse 12, souls yet still come in to join themselves to the church of Christ and defy both the statistics and the prophets of doom, from outside they come in ones and twos and sometimes more we feel perhaps that we see less of it in our own congregation, perhaps we do, yes but even here we average one new convert a year for the past six years but conscious of our undoubted weakness what do we do?

we strengthen ourselves in God because we have nowhere else to go as Peter said to Jesus in John 6 in verse 68 Lord, to whom shall we go?

[ 15 : 17 ] thou hast the words of eternal life and we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ the Son of the living God we diversify our work and divide the labour as we do now today with the

setting apart but our brother in Christ to labour in the work of the diaconate a workman upon the wall of the city with a sword of the Spirit by his side and a hand for the tasks of the material and temporal things which are so necessary for the visible and outward presence of the spiritual kingdom of God it is a spiritual kingdom but it has material aspects it has practical and temporal and physical aspects all of which need attention all of which must be worked at we labour all in our different tasks just like, you know we're looking at the children with the different tools in the toolbox they've all got different tasks they've all got different purposes some are tiny little screws or nails some are great big hammers but it doesn't mean that one is worth more than the other because they have different tasks to fulfil likewise the different sizes of cards from children to their mothers it doesn't mean that one loves more or one is loved more or less it's just differences that we have and these differences are not a weakness they are a strength because a toolbox would be no use if it was all hammers it would be no use if it was all just nails or saws or screwdrivers all of the same kind the whole strength of the toolbox is the fact that every single tool is different and perfectly suited for the particular task and you won't always know what the task is going to be until you get there and see the problem it's why you take the toolbox with you you don't just take one screwdriver or one hammer or one saw and say oh it's the wrong problem it's the wrong tool you take the whole toolbox the Lord takes the Lord takes his whole church with it into the world in all the problems all the difficulties that he faces we live all in our different tasks different giftings different places on the wall

Paul described the church of God as a body differing limbs and parts and gifts if one part suffer then all the body suffers and so with Nehemiah and the wall the wall be breached in one place and the whole city is breached and overthrown our brother is to be set apart this morning because he's a proven workman of God that's why he's been elected invited chosen to this office he'll not cease to be a workman because of this ordination he won't cease to be fulfilling his own daily calling but he'll be doing that as an office bearer in the Lord's church everything that he does he will do in that capacity because each and every one of us is likewise a witness an ambassador or ambassadress for the Lord in our daily life but the weapons of his warfare and the tasks of his labour will become both more diverse and more particular with each new labourer upon the wall we become ourselves more confident and ideally encouraged to greater effort with each new weapon bearing guard we feel ourselves stronger so we are all as a people as a congregation strengthened by this ordination there's many of our people who can't be here today because they're sick or because they're confined or because they're unwell in different ways and they would love to be here but they'll still be with us in their spirit today they'll still be praying for this event and they'll still be encouraged and strengthened that it's going ahead we as a people are all strengthened by this ordination this morning encouraged to know that the Lord is yet in the midst of his people that just as the physical decay and disrepair that once beset the walls of Jerusalem was in Nehemiah's day reversed and rebuilt so we are unable to believe that likewise the spiritual personal numerical decline of God's church is by no means certain or inevitable but rather that the inexplicable and supernatural work of God is only just beginning it is no accident that we left off our reading in the midst of chapter 4 we could have read on into the subsequent chapters where the wall is finished and all the celebrations that take place but no we left our reading in the middle of chapter 4 for we left the work still in progress far from complete and yet never having stopped and so it is for us dangers there are many threats they multiply enemies surround but the church of God refuses to die and continues to be sustained by that single supernatural fact that as the bride of Christ she is neither left nor forsaken but rather God in the midst of her to dwell nothing shall her remove the Lord to her and help her with all of that write early proof may the Lord bless us with these few thoughts let us pray