

Good Morning, Southover!

As you may know we're in the book of Nehemiah and today we come to Chapter 3.

When Jeremy read the first few verses the contents sounded as interesting as a phone book! Nehemiah chapter 3 – seems about as interesting as the BT Telephone Directory! So what has happened is that David has given me **this** passage to preach on and then left the country!! These two things may not be unrelated! ☺

Chapter 3 is about 38 families building a wall

As it was read, (if you're anything like me) you were probably thinking "*well who cares if Abdulah the Shuman-uman-ite repaired 50 feet of Wall just left of the dung gate! and who cares if Elia-sheeshkebab did the next 25 feet*"

"Why would God put this in his Word? – and more importantly
"why would David ask Steve to preach on it!"
Well those were MY questions this week!!

Let me give you some background...

Jerusalem has lain in ruins for 141 years.

Nehemiah, (*a supremely ordinary man*) has been called by God to go and repair it – in other words to rescue and redeem the city.

He prays about it, plans it, and miraculously gets permission from the King to do something about it.

When he assesses the scale of the problem and then says .

"OK God has called us to redeem this city, who is with me".

and in Chapter 2 a whole bunch of ordinary people stick their hands in the air and say "*ohhh pick me, pick me*"

And so, in Chapter 3 we have 38 families, working in 42 different teams, spread across 7 city districts, going to work.

And the question is "what has this got to do with us?"

Well, we are the Southover 11:15 congregation, and we have come together (with the rest of our church) to share the love of God with those who don't know him. To know Christ better – to make Christ better known

We believe God loves this world

We believe that knowing him changes your life

We believe that God makes sense out of this world, gives value and purpose, hope and direction to our lives.

And we believe this is worth sharing

We have our particular part to play in redeeming and loving this town, just a small part, just a small section, but it is ours –

and God has shown us how to do it in Nehemiah chapter 3.

He shows us that

we are called as individuals; and

we are called as a community;

to make a difference.

Three ideas: as individuals, as community; to make difference.

That's what I want to bring out of our passage!

1. We are called as Individuals.

The very thing that is odd about this text, is in fact, its greatest lesson.

The thing that is odd about this text is that God takes the trouble to list the names and actions of 38 normal, everyday, obscure, people who are serving him.

And, it may be boring for us to read but for God and for ***them it isn't!***

v1 Eliashib went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate

We have no idea who Eliashib is.

But God does and so does Eliashib!

WE might read it and say "What a waste of time reading this."

But Eliashib is thinking "this is really cool!"

When the Bible gets written down Eliashib gets his advance copy in heaven he is saying...

"Hey I'm in this! – do you see my name right there."

In the Concordance, there I am 'Eliashib'

I'm with the E's.

How cool is that!

Yesterday Owen got a mention on the Internet by a reviewer of Minecraft Videos– he got so excited about it – "hey Dad that's me – that's my game they are talking about!"

Well imagine how excited Eliashib got when God honoured him!

It is his insignificance that makes this passage so powerful for us.

God is making a point... He is saying to us

I take note of your life.

I see your days, your service, your ministry,

I see your hard-work, and your sacrifice, and your sore back

I know your name.

I know what you are doing.

And I WILL honour it.

Whatever we do for the kingdom of God,

Whatever we do, personally, for his glory,

The service, the investment, the time, the effort

God knows it and records it and honours it!

How cool is that!

God takes what we offer as individuals and honours it – and one of the ways he honours it – is by blessing US through it!

Look God could have rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem with a click of his fingers.

He created the heavens and the earth, so the walls would have been no big deal.

But God chooses to rebuild the walls through individual people.

The reason is, because he blesses us through it.

I want you to picture that God is our Father,

and when we work with God, it's like working alongside our dad – and that's something wonderful!

God has a passion for people, as we work with him, as we join in with him, we both

get to know him more and we begin to share his passion.

our relationship with him builds, we share in his joy, we capture something of his heart, we develop the same passion!

You want to develop a relationship with someone,

you do something with them.

Indeed the more challenging it is, the more bonding grows!

God blesses us through our individual ministries!

There is this famous story of a man on the sea-shore that you'll have heard before, but I want come at it from a different angle.

*There was this old man walking down a beach at dawn,
he saw ahead of him what he thought to be a dancer.*

A young man running across the sand, rhythmically bending down to pick up a stranded starfish and throw it back into the sea.

*The old man gazed as the young man again and again threw the small starfish back into the water.
He approached him and asked why he spent so much energy doing what seemed to be such a waste of time.
The young man explained that the stranded starfish would die in the heat of the day.*

"But there are miles of beach, and tens of thousands of starfish.

How can your effort make any difference?"

The young man looked down at the small starfish in his hand, and as he threw it to safety he said, "It makes a difference to this one!"

And that's true. But the young man missed something.
It also made a difference to him.

Imagine God had called to rescue these star-fish
Imagine this man is doing something with and for God
he is sharing his passion with his Father
he is proving his faith to himself,
he is demonstrating the compassion of God
And it is growing with each star-fish saved!

He will be able to sleep at night knowing he has done something for God
He won't know it but he is becoming a reflection of God's compassion and that is all God wants of him.
to be fulfilled as humans by reflecting the love of the Father.

Why be involved in the mission of the Southover Church?
Why point people to God?
Why labour on a small part of the wall of such a large town?
Why devote yourself to growing this congregation, of loving each other?

Because though it we grow!
Because through it we work alongside our Father!
Because through it God changes us and blesses us!
Because through it we learn about God, we reflect his passion, we become more like him, we prove our faith
And because through it God honours us.

The first thing we see – is that God calls us as individuals to get stuck into his mission -
Will you personally respond to that call?

But secondly, this passage shows us that

2. They do it as part of a Community.

There are 38 family groups, friends, and work-colleagues here.
They respond as a community.

Nehemiah doesn't try to do this by himself.
This wall is 20 feet high, upto 10 feet wide, and about 2½ miles long.
It has lain in ruins for 141 years.
Nehemiah didn't just show up with a willing heart and a lot of determination.

He needs help,

He is stuffed unless the community come together.

2.1 They had a theological unity.

They knew and loved the same God,
They had “every that matters” in common,
They were motivated by a common experience of the grace of God.

And so are we

We stand amazed at the cross and say “Jesus if you would do this for me, is there anything I would not want to do for you”.

We have “every that matters” in common,

We have this theological unity that is based on the Grace of God.

2.2 They also had a missional unity.

They wanted to serve God

v3 Hassenaaah and Sons did the Fish Gate

v8 Uzziel the goldsmith and Hananiah the perfume-makers did the walls

v10 Jedaiah made repairs opposite his house

Everyone did something different, everyone played their part

Nehemiah gets all the people together and he formed them into teams, deputised leaders, assigned them to sections and organised a plan.

We have welcomers, tea and coffee makers, musicians, lunch makers, children’s leaders, crèche leaders, people that tidy up afterwards – and as we do this we create here a community where people, others, anyone can be valued and find God.

But we also have

Friday Night Live and After Hours where 40-80 young people learn about how to live and be and form an inclusive community.

We have Southover Community Care and Southover Counselling and Monday Club and Causeway Prospects, and Hospital Visitors and Pastoral Carers where people who need support can find it.

We have mission teams that educate, and initial Rain-Water harvesting projects and start Orphanages, and develop life-skill in the Ukraine, Egypt, Rwanda and Congo.

We give financial support £20-£30,000 given away last year by this community.

Everyone can do something, everyone can play their part.

The Rector can’t, doesn’t and mustn’t do it all

So we care for each other in Small Groups, in small sections.

One of the key differences between Southover and many other churches is that we are held together not because – The Rector is such a good guy, we all know him - because he isn’t particularly and you can’t...

What binds us together is not the personality of the Rector

What binds us together is our mission for God.

A church that is centred around the leader will never grow beyond that single persons influence; and will fall apart when that person leaves.

The Walls of Jerusalem were not about Nehemiah’s ego or his wall-building skills – they were about the commitment of the community to the mission.

2.3 They also had a relational unity.

They knew each other, they were friends and family to each other.
Everyone belonged.
It is everyone's job here to welcome everyone else.

Nehemiah couldn't do it alone
he needed the community,
bound by a common sense of God's love,
by a common sense of mission,
by a common sense of belonging

Join us in this,

3. Because finally they DID make a difference.

They built the wall,
they protected the city,
they created a place where the people of God could flourish,
they reminded people of the faithfulness of God.

They did what they could, in their time, to build a city full of God.

We are called to do the same.

*You know there was once a professor in a class-room, in a college in Illinois about 30 years ago.
This professor is a small French guy (about 5 foot nothing) who had such a convoluted surname that his
students just called him Dr B.*

*Dr. B taught theology and sometimes at the end of a class he would say to his students, "do you know that I
believe some day, what the disciples did in Acts 2 in Jerusalem will come alive in this town. In this city of
Chicago, some day there will be a church that will reach the un-churched and 1,000's of people will find
faith.*

It happened in Acts 2 and

I believe it will happen here in Chicago.

And the kids when they heard this, they didn't care.

"Is this going to be on the test, because if it isn't I am not going to study for it" ...

They weren't interested.

*But one boy stayed behind and said "Dr. B are you serious, do you really think this is going to happen,
do you really think the Holy Spirit could do this?"*

And Dr B said "I believe it".

*So this student (and his name is Bill Hybels) got together with a few others students and they started a little
outreach ministry to other school kids. Soon 10, 50, a 100 young people had joined them.*

*A few years later Bill Hybels goes back to Dr B. and says "Professor, God has blessed our youth ministry so
much that we feel God is leading us to start a church". So they rented "Willow Creek" cinema.*

There church began with less people than are here this morning.

But they began reaching out to their friends and people began to come to faith.

Today Willow Creek is a church of over 20,000 people.

*And on their 20th Anniversary they wanted to thank God for everything that he had done. So they decide to
hold a Thanksgiving service and they hired the Chicago Bulls football stadium.*

Well over 20,000 people filed in. And as they came in they gave them a little memento: a key ring with a torch on it.

And for 2 hours they worshipped God.

And at the end they said “we have to do something before we close, we want to just turn all the lights out and for everyone who has come to faith through this Church just to turn your torch on and we’ll see a picture of the light of Christ in our lives”.

So that’s what they did.

*kerchung, kerchung, kerchung –
the lights went out and the whole place was pitch black.*

Then Bill Hybels counted 1, 2, 3 and everyone switched on their torch, the whole stadium became filled with 1,000’s upon 1,000’s upon 1,000’s of torches lights.

There was this collective gasp – look what God has done!

And a photographer took a wide angle picture of it. But as he did so someone on the platform also takes a flash photo too.

Now when they developed it they saw an amazing sea of tiny pin-prick lights, but just over in the left hand corner where the other flash had gone off they could make out a face.

Just one face out of an auditorium of 20,000 people.

It was Dr.B.

And he was weeping like a baby.

Why?

Because he knew that it was worth it.

All those prayers. All those conversations. All those times when he didn’t know if people were going to respond or not..

Now he knew it was worth it.

Here is what I want to say.

God gave to Dr.B something he has not given to us.

He gave to Dr.B a picture of the impact he had had with his life.

He gave him a picture that he had been just a small link in a chain that led to all those people to knowing Jesus.

Dr.B was just part of a chain that led everyone in that stadium to God.

But hasn’t done that for you.

As you sit here today you have no idea the impact you have.

You have no idea how many times God will use you as a link in a chain to bring someone to him.

You don’t know that, that word you had with someone to invite them to Lewes Sings Gospel or to Church or to Alpha was part of an overall movement that ended up with another soul finding heaven. You don’t know.

You don’t know how many times, when you screwed up your courage to say something that didn’t seem to make an iota of difference. You don’t know what God did with that years later.

You may think you failed, but don’t know.

You don’t know that maybe 5 years later that person came to Christ – and they become a Church Leader who brought many others to Christ. You don’t know.

You don't know how many times a neighbour has watched you quietly coping with tragedy in your life (the rebellious son, the cancer, the impossible relationship). They watched you, they knew you were a Christian. And 10 years later when they underwent something similar – they remembered the way you lived with God – and they wanted to do the same – so they received God in their life too. You don't know.

You don't know that after you die, that child that you tried to teach to love God actually had children of their own and one of them was an evangelist – and many came to faith. You don't know.

Nehemiah didn't know that Jerusalem was going to be the centre point for the salvation of the world...
He didn't know in Acts 2 God's Spirit was going to be outpoured into the world. He didn't know
All he knew was that God had called him to rebuild a wall.

And God has called you to do the same.

He has called you individually – will you respond

He has called you as part of this community – will you find your place here (here on a Sunday or in the wider church)

Will you seek to make a difference in people's lives forever.

Will you hear God's call?