

All the People

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Welcome to Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church. It's my joy to bring God's word to you this morning.

My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church. Special welcome if you are new or visiting with us. We're glad you're here.

And we are glad you're here not because we are trying to fill seats, but because we are following Jesus together as one community. And as we follow Jesus together, we are convinced that there's no one so good that they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it.

And so God is going to have something to say to everyone in his word, and everyone needs to hear what God has to say. If you've been with us, you know that we are in the book of Nehemiah. The book of Nehemiah is a book about a man named Nehemiah who lived in the 5th century B.C. And he lived during a time when the people of Israel, God's people in the Old Testament, were returning slowly from exile. They had been freed from exile in 538 B.C. And what we read about here is in 445 B.C., almost 100 years later.

[1 : 08] So the process of returning from exile is still continuing. And this is the process of Nehemiah, along with God's people, turning back from their sin, abandoning God's city and his ways, and turning back to God in repentance.

This is part of a much larger story that's covered by many books in the Bible. And this particular part of the story is about the rebuilding of the wall around the city of Jerusalem. The city of Jerusalem is the city that God had given his people, the people of Israel, to be a light to the nations.

That everyone in the world could look to this city to see what it is like when God's people follow after God's ways. Now we've been through quite a lot together as we've gone through the book of Nehemiah.

We've seen internal problems and external problems. We've seen oppression of the poor by God's people, not even the people outside. We've also seen tremendous unity in chapter 3 as God's people worked together, despite their differences, to build the temple, excuse me, to build the wall. And then in chapter 6, we saw the fear that they encountered as they were going on God's mission. And now we come to chapter 7, which I know that many of you have been looking forward to.

[2 : 15] And I say that only half-jokingly. If you're not aware, if you haven't looked at the end of your worship guide, you know that this is mostly a long list of names and numbers.

I only say that half-jokingly because this is a wonderful opportunity for some people. There are some congregants, and you've already told me this, who love passages like this. I would love to think that it's out of Christian charity.

Some of it's just because this is a great stump-the-chump situation. And it's fun to watch a preacher squirm. So if that's you, you're welcome. It also raises a question of why it is that we cover passages like this.

It would be easy for me to preach the very beginning of chapter 7 and just skip to chapter 8 and just tell you, yes, that was a long list of names, and we're going to keep going. And we read passages like this for two reasons.

First of all, we, and this is of lesser importance, we read them because we want to stay honest. It would be incredibly easy for me as your pastor to find passages that were easy to preach, be tempting to find passages that talked only about topics that everyone in this world could agree with us about, about God's goodness and His mercy and His justice.

[3 : 25] And so we pick books of the Bible, and we preach through the entire book because it makes us preach through things that are hard at times. Sometimes we have to touch on topics that our culture might disagree with us about.

And so we do this, first of all, to keep ourselves honest, but that's not the most important reason we do it. The most important reason that we preach through passages like this is because they are part of God's Word. And we believe what God tells us when He says that His Word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold, and that it is sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb.

God's Word is living and active. It was His Word in Genesis chapter 1 that brought the very world into existence. And it is God's Word that we find out in Romans 10 that takes sinners and brings them to faith.

And so we read Nehemiah chapter 7 as an act of faith and trust and hope in God's Word, that He has good for us and He has something to teach us. And so that's how we come and turn to this chapter in this book.

Now as we come to it, I'm going to name the same reality that I named last week, which is that sometimes as we read long chapters like this, it is hard to pay attention. So I'm going to give you not one homework assignment, but two homework assignments this time.

[4 : 39] This is you, which is all of us. First of all, I want you to look out for the problem that Nehemiah faces. Nehemiah actually faces a big problem in this chapter, which is mostly of names, and that problem is going to show up in verses 1 through 4.

And then if you are tempted to fall asleep during the list of names and numbers, my challenge to you is to try to track the number of groups. Not the numbers of sons, because we're going to hear about a lot of sonsets, but numbers like people of Israel or Levites or priests, anything under that category.

Okay, that's my challenge to you as we go through this. There's a problem, and then there are groups. And with that, we are going to read Nehemiah chapter 7. And remember that this is God's word. And God tells us that while the grass may fall and the flowers fade, it is his word that stands forever.

In other words, while each of us in this room will die one day unless the Lord returns, God's word is going to continue. And so we're going to read it now, starting at verse 1. Now when the wall had been built, and I had set up the doors and the gatekeepers, the singers and the Levites had been appointed, I gave my brother Hananiah and Hananiah the governor of the castle charge over Jerusalem, for he was a more faithful and God-fearing man than many.

And I said to them, Let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot. And while they are still standing guard, let them shut and bar the doors. Appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, some at their guard posts and some in front of their own homes.

[6 : 10] The city was wide and large, but the people within it were few, and no houses had been rebuilt. Verse 5. Then my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles and the officials and the people to be enrolled by genealogy.

And I found the book of the genealogy of those who came up at the first, and I found written in it. These were the people of the province who came up out of the captivity of those exiles, whom Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had carried into exile.

They returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his town. They came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Ramiah, Nahomini, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mizpareth, Bigvi, Nahim, Banna.

The number of the men of the people of Israel, the sons of Peresh, 2,172. The sons of Shephethiah, 372. The sons of Ere, 652.

The sons of Pehath-Moab, namely the sons of Jeshua and Joab, 2,818. The sons of Elam, 1,254.

[7 : 17] The sons of Zatu, 845. The sons of Zaka, 760. The sons of Benue, 648. The sons of Bebi, 628.

The sons of Asgad, 2,322. The sons of Edenakam, 667. The sons of Bigvi, 2,067. The sons of Aden, 655.

The sons of Atter, namely of Hezekiah, 98. The sons of Hashem, 328. The sons of Bezi, 324. The sons of Heraph, 112.

The sons of Gibeon, 95. The men of Bethlehem and Netophah, 188. The men of Anathoth, 128. Verse 28.

The men of Beth-Azmaveth, 42. The men of Kiriath-Jerim, Shethra and Beroth, 743. The men of Ramah and Geba, 621.

[8 : 17] The men of Michmas, 122. The men of Bethel and Ai, 123. The men of the other Nebo, 52. The sons of the other Elam, 1,254.

The sons of Haram, 320. The sons of Jericho, 345. The sons of Lot, Hadid and Ono, 721. The sons of Sinai, 3,930.

The priests. The sons of Jedi, namely the house of Jeshua, 973. The sons of Emmer, 1,052. The sons of Pasher, 1,247.

The sons of Haram, 1,017. The Levites. The sons of Jeshua, namely of Cadmiel, of the sons of Hodeva, 74. The singers. The sons of Asaph, 148.

The gatekeepers. The sons of Shalem. The sons of Eter. The sons of Talman. The sons of Akab, the sons of Hatata, the sons of Shobai, 138. Verse 46.

[9 : 19] The temple servants. The sons of Zihah, the sons of Hassaphah, the sons of Tabiath, the sons of Keros, the sons of Siah, the sons of Paddan, the sons of Lebanon. The sons of Hagaba, the sons of Sheolmai, the sons of Hanan, the sons of Geddel, the sons of Gehar.

The sons of Reiah, the sons of Rezin, the sons of Nakoda, the sons of Ghazm. Verse 57.

Verse 61.

Verse 61.

Verse 66. Verse 79. Verse 72.

[11 : 34] Verse 70. Now some of the heads of fathers' houses gave to the work. The governor gave to the treasury 1,000 derricks of gold, 50 basins, 30 priests' garments, and 500 minas of silver.

And some of the heads of fathers' houses gave unto the treasury of the work 20,000 derricks of gold and 2,200 minas of silver. And what the rest of the people gave was 20,000 derricks of gold, 2,000 minas of silver, and 67 priests' garments.

So the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, some of the people, the temple servants, and all Israel lived in their towns. And when the seventh month had come, the people of Israel were in their towns.

Please pray. Very appreciated, but unnecessary. I apologize, but I'm not sorry. Please pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word.

Dear Father in heaven, we thank you that you are a good father to us. You don't leave us to figure things out on our own. You don't leave us to stumble around in the dark.

[12 : 53] But instead, you shine a light. You tell us the way that we should go in your word. And you've given us Jesus to help us, to redeem us, and sustain us as we follow after you.

And so we ask all these things in his name. Amen. We have come here to the very end of the rebuilding of the wall. Now, I've been telling you all along that Nehemiah chapter 7 is about building a wall.

And yet, if you've been paying attention, you know that we have many chapters to go. So we're going to talk about many things besides walls. But we find out here in verse 1 that everything is finished.

In chapter 6, we knew that the wall was finished, but the gates were not there. And now we find that the gates are here as well. Everything is finished. But there's a problem. While the wall is complete, there are not enough people to fill the city.

We're told in verse 1 that Nehemiah appoints gatekeepers and singers and Levites. And he doesn't tell us explicitly why, but perhaps the most likely reason is that he did not have enough guards to watch the city.

[14 : 02] And so just like we saw Levites and all sorts of people building the wall, which is way outside of their area of expertise, their experience, so we also see them guarding the wall.

He has to set up folks who live in the city, the inhabitants. Verse 3. The inhabitants of Jerusalem are appointed as guards. Some of their guards post, and then this is Nehemiah's brilliant, some in front of their homes.

So Nehemiah puts people to guard things that they personally find valuable. But even this does not solve the problem that we find in verse 4. The city was wide and large, but the people within it were few, and no houses had been rebuilt.

And so in this place where we should expect a celebration, we would think that at this point in the book, Nehemiah would tell us about the dedication service that they had, about how everyone rejoiced at the building of the wall, but instead of celebration, they have a much more important task on their hands, and that is triage.

No one has been living in the city of Jerusalem, at least very few people have, because there have not been walls. And so while it's exciting on the one hand, the task before them to hold down the

city to guard it is overwhelming on the other.

[15:10] And so as they follow God in his mission, as we've seen, there are many challenges that come to us. Many things that we face. We have fear on the one hand, discouragement on the other, God's enemies coming up against us.

But here the problem is that as they look around, it's not God's enemies. It's just that there's not many people standing with them. There's not many people that are there following after God's mission with them.

And while we are not rebuilding a literal wall around a literal city, if we follow after God in his ways, there will be times when we look around, and we do not see many people standing with us.

There will be times when we are all bought in on following God in his ways, and we just realize there aren't many other people who are excited about that. There aren't many other people who are standing with us.

There are times when we want to fight for goodness and justice, and we realize that the people we wished and hoped would be with us are instead apathetic. There are times that we are fighting and striving to remain sexually faithful, following after God's commands and his intentions, and yet no one else is with us.

[16:25] And it feels at times like we're fighting the battle all by ourselves. There will be times when we're trying to raise our children to love God in his way, and yet it seems like there's no one else there.

There are very few people who share that goal with us. There will be times where perhaps you're single and you want to be married, but you also want to be with someone who follows after God. And when you look around, there's not many other people who are doing that. Perhaps you want to keep walking with God, but your family wants to walk away from him. Perhaps you are not following after Jesus, but you want to, you're thinking about it.

But you're afraid that if you do, your friends and your spouse won't come with you. There are many times when we're going on God's mission. And the problem is not necessarily fear like we saw in the last chapter, but discouragement, but loneliness.

Who else is going to stand with us? If we are going to stand with God, is it going to be a lonely journey? Is it going to be constantly uphill?

[17:37] It's with that question in mind that Nehemiah decides he's going to call an assembly. This list of names is not something accidental or coincidental in the book of Nehemiah, but it is a response to this problem that they come up against as they look to guard the city that they are trying to rebuild.

And so we see in verse 5, Nehemiah decides to assemble the nobles and the officials and the people to be enrolled. And it doesn't tell us exactly why he's doing this, but presumably, as he knows that the city needs more inhabitants, he is going to do an audit of the census, figure out who there is that's in the surrounding town so that he can begin to recruit people and bring them back into the city of Jerusalem that had been abandoned.

And as he provides this list for us, we're told that it's going to have three categories in it. It's going to have the nobles, the officials, and the people. And yet the list does not go quite in that order.

If you've been tracking, if you tried to list the groups, you may notice that the first group that's listed is actually not the nobles and the officials. Instead, in verses 6 and 7, it's simply the people. We see, first, these were the people of the province.

And then at the end of verse 7, the number of the men of the people of Israel. And so while we have a book of the Bible whose title is a name about one man, this is a book that has a surprising number of names in it.

[19:10] While on the one hand, Nehemiah is the leader and the person whose name is given to the book. On the other hand, he doesn't look to do it all by himself. There are other accounts, historical accounts, of what happened during this time, and they do not include these long lists of names.

Because to other historians, historians outside of God's people, that is unimportant and meaningless. It's only the leader that matters. But here the nobles and the officials are pushed to second place.

Because it's God's people that Nehemiah looks to for the work. If we're tempted to believe that Nehemiah is some kind of hero leader who's just leading the charge, he's the one we should be

praising.

The long list of names that we find, not just in this chapter, but previously in chapter 3, and we have a few more lists coming up in future chapters as well, cut against the grain of all of that. This is a book with one man's name on the one hand.

But it's a book with lots of names on the other hand. When we're tempted to believe that we're alone and no one else is standing with us, we're reminded of the truth that we saw in chapter 3, that God's people are many and they move together.

[20 : 27] Not only are they many and they move together, but that's the only way, that's the only way that God's people can work. That's the only way we're able to go on mission together, following after God and going in his ways.

We've already talked a lot about this in chapter 3, about different people, but one vision. And so I'm simply going to say this.

We need a lot of guards for our gates at Cheyenne Mountain. And if you come to our church, week after week, we are glad you're here.

But we are not interested in filling seats. We are interested in following after Jesus together as one community. And so if you do not have a gate to guard, please come and talk to me.

Talk to one of our elders. Because if you look and you think, wow, this church is running great.

Everything is getting done that needs to be done. No one needs me here. Nothing could be further from the truth.

[21 : 35] We don't just need Nehemiahs. We don't just need nobles and officials. We need the people of Israel. As we look at this long list of names, we're reminded of the number of people who are available in Israel to help live in the city.

and work in the city and come alongside everyone who's there with them to follow God in his ways. And so the message here is not one of shame, but one of invitation.

We need you. We need every single person in this church to come and work with us as we follow after God. And so if you don't have a gate, if no one has asked you to help guard or work with something, then come.

Help us as we are following after Jesus together as one community. Be a part of the work that God is doing here at Cheyenne Mountain. The work of rebuilding the wall is not something that Nehemiah can do alone.

It's not something the nobles and officials can do alone, but it's something that's going to take all of these numbers of people to do. And so what do we do when we look around and we're following after God, but it doesn't seem like there's enough people around us?

[22 : 59] What we have to do on the one hand, what Nehemiah does, he gathers the people so that he can list them and recruit them. But on the other hand, we have to do what the people do, which is come forward and be willing to stand up and serve, to be part of everything that God is doing here through the city of Jerusalem.

If you are reading carefully, though, there was a little bit of a plot twist here with the list of names. So Nehemiah has a problem, right? On the one hand, he thinks that he needs more people to come into the city.

And so we would assume that he's going to count the people that are alive. Except in verse 5, we find something different. He is going to assemble the nobles and the officials and the people to be enrolled, but that's not the list that I just read to you.

I did not just read you a list of people who were from 445 B.C. These, verse 6, actually verse 5, I found the book of the genealogy of those who came up at the first.

In other words, I found the book of people who came up in 538 B.C. I found the book of the first people who returned when they were allowed to leave exile in Babylon and come back to Jerusalem.

[24 : 19] And so that's what he says in verse 6. These were the people of the province who came up out of the captivity of those exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had carried into exile. At the time that Nehemiah is writing this, Nebuchadnezzar is dead.

And most likely, everyone's name that he just listed is dead as well. This would be like me thinking that we have a problem guarding our gates here at Cheyenne Mountain.

We need more people. Instead of listing, instead of going to our new church directory, instead I make a phone call to Ken O'Connell and I say, Ken, I really need the role of members from 1996.

And as I'm going through trying to figure out who's at the church right now, instead I just pause and I pull out the role of people who started Cheyenne Mountain in 1996 and I start reading through it. And then I list it. This list of names that Nehemiah gives would be like me coming in front of you and listing a group of people who were working for the church in the 1930s.

[25 : 24] He's looking to count people now but instead he reminds everyone of people in the past. It's sort of like if you watch your license plates in Colorado carefully, you know there's the Pioneer license plate.

And it used to be until the late 2000s that you would have to prove that you had ancestors in Colorado going back at least 100 years so that you could get a Pioneer license plate. Apparently that was illegal.

So now I could get a Pioneer license plate even though I've only lived here for a couple years. And you all would know I was lying but no one else on the roads would. That is what Nehemiah is doing here.

He is showing the people of Israel that when it comes to Jerusalem they have Pioneer license plates. They can look back almost 100 years to the people who came at first.

But why does Nehemiah do that? Why instead of just counting the people who existed then who could help him? Does he go back and look at what happened 100 years before?

[26 : 36] First of all Nehemiah is giving them great hope. As they're looking around and they don't see enough people with them they know that they're not alone.

This was not their idea. The city of Jerusalem was not their idea. They're joining into a work that God's remnant has been part of for over almost 100 years.

They're joining into something that God had started thousands of years before with Abraham. And so they're continuing a freight train that will not stop. As they're discouraged in the moment as they're wondering in the moment what's going to happen all they have to do is look back to God's faithfulness over time through generations.

God's faithfulness through real time and real space. There are very few of us here there's a few of us but there's very few of us who were here when Cheyenne Mountain started.

And there's none of us here who were alive in the first century when the church started. And so if we look around and we're tempted to be discouraged because we don't see enough people with us we only have to remember that God is still at work.

[27 : 53] He's still at work in the way he's been at work for thousands of years. And he's put us here in this moment and this time to continue the work he has for us.

But it doesn't rest on us and one day unless the Lord returns we will pass it on to someone else. And so Nehemiah gives them tremendous hope as they look back on everything that's happened in the past.

The remnant their parents and grandparents and great grandparents who came back from exile in 538. but Nehemiah is also giving them tremendous humility.

There will come a day when everyone in this room will be dead. Unless Jesus returns as exciting as it is as we start this new chapter in our church's life as many times as I've been in this pulpit and it's not many no one knows the day or the hour.

And so whether it's in 3 weeks or in 30 years there will come a time when I step out of this pulpit for the last time. And unless Jesus returns our prayer is that there will come a day when no one in this room now will be worshipping at this church because we will have all gone to be with the Lord and there will be a new congregation and our hope is that we will be like this list in 538.

[29 : 29] They can look back not on our perfection as we know Nehemiah is coming to make up for what previous generations have not done but they can look back on our faithfulness and they can rest on our shoulders looking back to us like we look back to the people who have come before.

Our hope is that and prayer is that Cheyenne Mountain this church would be here for generations to come unless the Lord returns. And so as we look and work now we look back to people who have worked in the past and we also look forward to people we'll hand it off to in the present.

We're going to talk more as our loan renegotiation comes up about our building campaign and I hope that we reach our goals for our building campaign. But no matter how much money you give there will come a day when the only way someone will know your name is if they read it in a list. In fact that's exactly what we see here at the end of chapter 7. After the list of people now I widely advertise the list of people and numbers we also have a list of people and gifts.

We don't just see the faithfulness of these people in returning back from Babylon as the remnant. We also see their faithfulness financially in building up the city of Jerusalem.

[30 : 53] We see the gifts and the gifts that are given by the nobles in the fathers' houses are almost equal to the same gifts that are given by the rest of the people. And so not only are they resting on the shoulders of these generations that come before them they're also resting on their faithfulness.

Their faithfulness not just in serving but in giving. As Nehemiah deals with the people who do not have enough around them.

On the one hand he encourages them with the list of everyone who's come before. But on the other hand he reminds them as they're tempted to believe that it's all up to them God is at work and there will come a day when our hope is that no one will remember us unless they read a list.

But that God's mission will continue. It will continue generation after generation after generation. And so the question is not will we be remembered or not because we won't.

The question is what will we inherit? Which city will we be found in? As we wonder if there's enough people next to us the question is not who is with us but where are we?

[32 : 15] God's city of Jerusalem was the place that he had given to his people. It was the place where his kingdom was meant to be on earth just as it is in heaven. As we move from the Old Testament to the New Testament we expand God's vision expands beyond Jerusalem.

Jerusalem was never meant to be something that stood by itself forever but it was meant to expand to the whole earth. God told Abraham in Genesis 12 that he was going to bless him to be a blessing and that all the nations of the earth all the families of the earth would be blessed through him.

And so what begins in Jerusalem spreads throughout the world. And so while we do not live and work for the city of Jerusalem while we don't try to find ourselves within the physical boundaries of the walls that Nehemiah rebuilt our hope is that we would be found in Jesus through faith in Christ. And so our hope is that we would be found with God's people now just as everyone in this list who is forgotten was found in the city of Jerusalem then. What will you inherit?

Where will you be found when you die? will you be in the city when Jesus returns? Because one day God's city will be full and complete.

[33 : 38] While it's imperfect now people feeling at times like they're standing alone there is going to come a day when Jesus is going to return for the second time. And when that happens his kingdom will be full and complete on earth as it is in heaven.

And so our hope is that Jesus uses us as part of his mission while we wait for that to happen.

Our hope is not that we have enough people around us but that we're following after Jesus together as one community. Christians are people who work in the present guarding the walls as they look back to the past for encouragement.

of what God has done. And then we look forward and hope to the future for what God will do. And our hope is this that as the prophets tell us in the Old Testament in the book of Habakkuk one day the earth will be covered with the knowledge of God just like the seas are covered with water.

Jerusalem is not the ending point but the starting point of God's mission. And one day will continue. it continues now and one day will take over the whole earth. One of my favorite scenes from The Lion King is when Mufasa and Simba are up on top of the rock.

[35 : 11] And Mufasa tells his son look Simba everything the light touches is our kingdom. God's promise to his people is that now in part and one day in full his kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven.

And when it does everything the light touches will be God and his kingdom. And so as we stand sometimes wondering if there's enough people around us or with us we take hope on the one hand that God is with us.

we're taking part in a small slice of his work. We have humility on the other hand knowing that one day we will die but God's mission will continue. And so we look to the past taking hope from what God's done.

We work in the present towards what God is doing and we have hope to the future knowing what will one day be fully true. And so we keep walking with God in his ways.

Please pray with me. dear Father in heaven we thank you that you are not ignorant you're not unaware of the challenges that we face in this world as we follow you.

[36 : 32] That you don't leave us there but that you meet us with your grace. We ask that you'd show us our need for your grace that you'd encourage us as we follow after you that you would give us the strength and the hope and the humility.

To continue working. And Father I ask that you would remind every one of us that one day we will die and that we will make our choices about you and your kingdom in light of that. We ask all these things in the name of your son. Amen.