

Caversham Baptist; 29th January 2017

What are we Building?

David Anderson/ what are you looking for? Julian/ What Jesus are you committed to?

Nehemiah 1; vs 1-4

Nehemiah 2; vs 1-20

This reading prepares me for quite a diverse and far reaching commentary on firstly where I think we are as a community and secondly as a people of God seeking “where to from here.” But underlying this scripture this morning I would like us to keep these two verses in mind.

2 Timothy 3; vs 16 & 17

Hebrews 12; vs. 1

Building. We are all builders one way or another. Whatever we put our energies into we are ultimately building something.. Whether it is a degree at our University, going to the Gym night and morning, being a mother, a friend or whatever, I cant think of too many things that we put our energies into that does not ultimately represent a product of what we have invested in. Even by being here today we are signaling to ourselves, others and to God that we desire to build a relationship with Him and with others.

I want to start with and keep this thread running throughout my talk this morning and Nehemiah in my opinion gives us a perfect platform to illustrate exactly what I mean when I say we are all constantly building.

Without getting into too much precise history of this period I think it is sufficient to note something of the background to our story. Firstly we have during the Babylonian occupation of Jerusalem the sacking of the Temple and the walls of the city itself. They didn't just settle for some minor demolishing of the city, they made a proper job of it so that it could no longer give protection to it's citizens. This was about 587 BC. But already the Babylonian Empire was in it's death throws and by 559 BC we have the Persian Empire ruling vast areas that once were part of a huge Babylonian Empire. During the sacking of Jerusalem many Israelites were taken into captivity and became subservient to firstly the Babylonians and now the Persians. As you may well know we now call that area that was known as Persia, Iran. It was towards the beginning of the establishment of the Persian Empire that we find Nehemiah, who must have represented a huge number of displaced Israelites, emerging in the courts of the King of Persia, King Artaxerxes. He hadn't been King for long but as the result of coups and murders here he was a very powerful ruler at this very important time in scripture. We find Nehemiah in Susa some distance from Babylon where the original displaced Israelites were taken to. Already we find the remnant were starting to revisit their roots with particular reference to their spiritual home, Jerusalem. In fact we find that it was in the year of 587 BC that the walls of Jerusalem were destroyed, and we have Nehemiah starting the rebuild in 454BC. A period of 133 years.

Nehemiah had never been to Jerusalem in that time to the best of our knowledge and here he is

in his role as Chief Cup Bearer for the King. He would not have just picked up the paper one day and thought “ I would like to apply for that Job”. This was a very important position and he would have had to have been trained for many years, firstly to do the job well but more importantly to pass all the security checks that would have been in place and then to get the trust of the King and his Queen. No easy task and one which would have required diligence and patience. A preparedness to serve others and to do so, as well as he could. Obviously a very high degree of personal integrity was required. Even in their isolation, the enslaved Israelites had not forgotten their God and He had certainly not forgotten them. Here Nehemiah was in a country far removed from that of his ancestors, and the God of his ancestors was still influencing them to bring about His divine purposes in and through them. A period as I have said, of approximately 133 years.

That's what I find so extra-ordinary that God's purposes were not just starting with Nehemiah, he was a very significant link in God's overall plan for His people.

This caused me to consider my own life and to us all and to ask “what was God wanting to say to us and what was His purpose in revealing Himself to us”? I am just a link as Nehemiah was, a very significant link, and so too is every one of you here this morning.

My attention has been brought to the significant chain of faith that I am part of. Recently I attended a 70th birthday party of a second cousin of mine where I met others who bore a reminder of where we had come from by a family name that has gone from generation to generation. The name I am referring to is my second name which is Beveridge. Hence the Peter B Duncan. The records I have are traceable back to the 1600 through the Auchterlonie line. I have a testimonial dated 1st July 1863 written to support a James Beveridge as he sailed from Scotland to New Zealand. He was 23 and the testimonial was written by the minister of the St James Place United Presbyterian Church extolling the fine Christian virtues this young man showed. He came to Dunedin, married a young woman named Eliza Fletcher Auchterlonie and they had 8 Children. James died of some sort of paralysis in the Dunedin lunatic asylum at the age of 51. One of his children, Eliza Auchterlonie Beveridge, my maternal grandmother married Robert Souness and they lived in Rutherford Street which as you know is 2 streets south of where we are presently. One of their children became my mother Olga and she and my Dad, Alan Duncan were married in this church just not yesterday and both were baptised believers, my Mum here and my Dad at South Dunedin.

As a matter of interest the Beveridge name has continued to my daughter Claire and to her daughter Bethany. I did mention to Deirdre that we perhaps should have included the name Auchterlonie in hers but she didn't warm to that thought.

So here I am as with Nehemiah looking at a period of 133 plus years and I too ask, “ What legacy do I leave and what am I building that will ultimately bring glory to my God and Saviour ?”

As an aside I took the year 1863, the year that James Beveridge left Scotland and I added 133 approximately to it and I came to roughly now for the mathematicians in our midst, the year

1999, which was the year that Joan and I left New Zealand for Sth Africa for 2 years. Here this baton of faith travels from Scotland to New Zealand and then to Sth Africa. I find that extraordinary. The baton of faith that Nehemiah was given started in Jerusalem and it went from one to the other then back to Jerusalem.

How are you dealing with the legacy of faith of which you are a part of? Who are the great cloud of witnesses that surround you? As Paul wrote in Hebrews. We are surrounded by this great cloud of witnesses and what are they requiring of us? What are they requiring of me? As I give some thought to some of those in my life I cant help but name firstly my parents, my wife, my parents-in-law, and many from this community who have gone to be with the Lord and many of you still serving and encouraging me on my walk through this extra-ordinary life.

Here is where the building bit comes in. But I hear you say that I am not a builder and what could I do that would make a significant difference in what God is doing here at Caversham, in Dunedin, in New Zealand and indeed throughout the world.

It's interesting to review your own gifts in moments like this and I have never considered myself to be a builder as such but in spite of this I have built everything from workshops, farm sheds, sheep yards, even 7 houses not to mention 3 double student units while in South Africa. And then in my capacity as an Earth-moving Contractor over many years I have built much that only required machinery to do so. But is that the only building I have done? I would like to think not.

What could the servant from the courts of Artaxerxes do to rebuild the walls of the City of God, as he felt God wanted him to do. He had no formal building training that we are aware of but in spite of this God was preparing him to accomplish something that would stretch him in ways he never imagined but the equipping that God was doing in him that was the most important was in the area of faith. Faith in God that would enable him to do what God called him to do. Faith in the fact that sometimes without our being aware of the fact, God has been teaching us all that we will need to know to start out. To take the next step.

What was the next step for Nehemiah? He never imagined that God had him in a relationship with the only one who could help. He was the King. Nehemiah's relationship with the King gave him access to all the resources of the King. Resources without which he could not begin let alone attempt the project that God was calling him to do. Is that what the King of Kings is waiting to hear from us? Lord I need this, that, and the other thing, all those resources to get started on what I believe you are asking of me to do for you. I think if we all followed Nehemiah's example and from an intimate relationship with the King of Kings we could all do incredible things for Him to bring glory to His name. It brings to mind that wonderful chorus from past years which went something like this;

“He owns the cattle on a thousand hills, the wealth of every mine. He owns rivers and the rocks and rills , the sun and moon that shine ; wonderful riches more than tongue can tell, He is my Father so they're mine as well. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills I know that He will care for me.”

Next comes the action. Nehemiah had to put into action what God had in mind for him and it necessitated his setting out. This was no small journey and I have no doubt that on the way he would have been saying to himself, “what on earth have I committed myself to?” He would have had time to reconsider and no-one would have blamed him. Very roughly I have estimated that he would have had to travel something like 1000 to 1200 kms if not considerably more. There was quite a contingent with him so they would not have made the journey quickly. Then when he arrived in Jerusalem there was according to the scriptures we have read a period of quietly recovering from the journey, settling in and after three days he set out to understand the enormity of the task. He had still not told anyone what he was there for. Then in verse 17; he takes a deep breath and informs all the residents why he is there and what the King had instructed him to do and the people's response I am sure would have astounded Nehemiah. They said, “lets do it.”

You see when God is in something then He has gone before and prepared the way. This was an amazing confirmation to Nehemiah I have no doubt, but still it does take your breath away when we see all obstacles cast aside as the way opens up for us to move into what He has ordained.

What has God ordained for Caversham and how will that play out in 2017? What part do I play in it? I am firmly of the opinion that all of life is a building process and to sit back and rely on what has taken place in the past is not sufficient, is not wise, and once again I firmly believe that it does not reflect well on what that vast “cloud of witnesses” has given us to do. They have passed the baton of faith on to us and it is our responsibility to take it and to build on it to ensure that what is built will ultimately bring glory to God.

Nehemiah's task was to inspire the people of Jerusalem but he was not able to do it alone. He required the assistance of every citizen of Jerusalem to do what only they could do. As with every community, we represent such a diverse range of interests, abilities, strengths and passion. But one thing we do have in common is the desire to live in safety and to make sure that our loved ones, those of the next generation, live in situations where God can establish His calling on all their lives. The same applies today as it did in Jerusalem we will express our diversity in what we are building but with God directing what is built, will bring glory to God. But we need to do what only we can do and we need to acknowledge that not only a small section of our community can do it. Nor a majority. All are called to do their section of the building in order that there be no portions of the wall through which the enemy can enter.

Enemy. I hear you say. Yes. The moment that Nehemiah started the task the enemy took note. In this instance it was Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem. They used every ploy to undermine the work but there was such a unity of spirit amongst the people of Jerusalem that it was staggering how quickly the walls went up. Nothing worthwhile will be accomplished without some opposition but so long as it ensures that we all encourage one another, respect one another and look out for each other, what will be built will sing God's praises and be to His glory. It will be a witness to all around that God is doing a significant work amongst us and it will reflect the diversity that we represent. We each need to make sure that our differences are reflected to

ensure that, and for that to happen, we need firstly to make our opinions known, and then that they are respectfully taken on board. That is what Nehemiah would have had to do to have done, to accomplish such an enormous task as completely and as quickly as he did.

I see so many parallels between the task that Nehemiah was called to do and what each of us are called to do. That is, give all our energies to what will last forever and only that which God ordains will do that. My purpose in life is to come to know Him, express His love and grace to all I encounter and that every encounter, every task I put my hand to will be building something to His glory. The finished walls of Jerusalem heralded an amazing time of praise and worship to God. May that be our experience as well.

I have been accused sometimes of being quite verbose. That is I use more words than necessary and that what I mean to say sometimes gets lost in all the words, so in order that you go away quite clear in what I wanted to say I recap very briefly.

2017 for you whether personally, in your work situation, in your Church fellowship, in your family or in your relationship with the Lord is a year where you are being called to build. You personally are very important to what God has in mind. As 2nd Timothy 3; 16 & 17 says, “all scripture is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training”; that is all the input that the “great cloud of witnesses” who have gone before us have had in our lives, may and can make us thoroughly equipped for every good work. You are needed. You are equipped. May what God is calling all of us to do this year herald in for us an amazing time of praise and worship to our Saviour Jesus.

May we add to what we put our efforts into this year the Latin symbols S D G as Bach and Handel and others did to their religious manuscripts. They stand for the words Soli Deo gloria which means Glory to God. That what has been done has been with Him in mind and for His glory.

If you are here today and have never surrendered your life to Jesus, claiming Him as your personal saviour then please, do not leave here today without speaking to someone. Tap me on the shoulder after, even harder if necessary to get my attention and I would consider it an amazing privilege to chat with you and pray with you in order that you know Jesus as your own personal Saviour. As a 76 year old man who has walked with Jesus for over 60 years let me assure you that a life lived without Him in control of your life is no life at all.

Benediction; Jude; 24 & 25