

Slide 1

Having A Mind To Work

NEHEMIAH 4:1-6

Introduction

1. Over 150 years ago, Fanny J. Crosby penned the words to a hymn which many of us have grown up singing.
2. The words to this hymn call for a response on our part and are still just as powerful today as they were then.

Slide 2

3. The name of the hymn is "*To The Work.*" Listen to these words from the first two stanzas:

**To the work! To the work! We are servants of God;
Let us follow the path that our Master has trod;
With the balm of His counsel our strength to renew,
Let us do with our might what our hands find to do.**

**To the work! To the work! Let the hungry be fed;
To the fountain of life let the weary be led;
In the cross and its banner our glory shall be,
While we herald the tidings, "Salvation is free!"**

4. In our reading this morning, we find a statement by Nehemiah as he recounts the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem in the latter half of the fifth century B.C.

“So we built the wall and the whole wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work” (Nehemiah 4:6).

5. Just two chapters later, in Nehemiah 6:15, we learn just how hard they worked, “So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month of Elul, in fifty-two days” (ESV).
6. All of this, because, “the people had a mind to work.”
7. Our elders have placed before each of us an invitation to join them in the work of this congregation.
8. This morning, I would like for us to look at the example of Nehemiah and the Jews in the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, in order to learn what is involved in “Having A Mind To Work.”

Slide 3

I. What Happened To Jerusalem

A. THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM

1. Because the Jews reached a point where they were no longer faithful before God, He withdrew His hand of protection from them.
2. In 586 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Babylonian Empire invaded the land and his army attacked and destroyed the city:
 - a. They tore down the walls and burned the city gates.
 - b. They demolished the temple and carried off anything of value from within.
 - c. A host of captives were also carried away into captivity.

3a

B. THE RETURN OF THE EXILES

1. Fifty years later, the great Babylonian empire had fallen and Cyrus the Great, king of Persia was on the throne.
2. Through God’s providential hand, Cyrus permitted the captives to go back home and rebuild the Temple of God and their once beautiful city.
3. In all 50,000 people returned to their homeland — They carried with them the various things which Nebuchadnezzar had removed from the temple.

4. They quickly set about rebuilding the temple, but ran into a great bit of opposition from those who were then living in the land.
5. Finally, after 20 years the temple was completed, but the rest of the city, for the most part, remained in ruins.

3b**C. DEPRESSING NEWS**

1. Fast forward another 72 years — 444 B.C.
2. Artaxerxes is now king of Persia, and a man by the name of Nehemiah is his cupbearer.
 - a. The position of cupbearer was one of great responsibility and privilege.
 - b. The cupbearer tasted the king's wine at each meal to make sure it wasn't poisoned.
 - c. The fact that Nehemiah, a Jew, held such a position speaks well to his character and ability.
3. It was at this time that one of Nehemiah's brothers, Hanani, and some other men from Judah came to see him.
4. When Nehemiah asked about everyone, the news he received was not good, "The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire" (Nehemiah 1:3).

Slide 4

II. Nehemiah's Response

A. HE WEPT AND PRAYED

"When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven." (Nehemiah 1:4)

1. Notice what Nehemiah did not do.
 - a. He didn't say, "That's not my problem. You have prophets, priests and Levites for such things as that."

- b. He didn't say, "It's not something I can do? I am a cup bearer for the king, not an expert in rebuilding walls and gates."
2. No, Nehemiah sat down, and for days he
 - a. "wept and mourned" for the city and his people.
 - b. fasted and prayed before God about what to do.
3. From Nehemiah's example, we see that those who have a mind to work care.
4. We care about God's people, God's work, and God's glory.

4a**B. HE PETITIONED THE KING**

1. The last thing Nehemiah asked of the Lord was this, "make Your servant successful today and grant him compassion before this man" (Nehemiah 1:11).
2. Four months went by before Nehemiah's opportunity came to approach the king.
3. When Nehemiah went in to serve the king his wine, his sadness concerning Jerusalem and his people was evident.
4. The king asked Nehemiah about his sadness, which frightened Nehemiah because to appear before the king in such a way could result in banishment or even death.
5. Nehemiah said to the king, "Let the king live forever. Why should my face not be sad when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies desolate and its gates have been consumed by fire?" (v. 3).
6. The king then asked Nehemiah, "What would you request?" (v. 4).
7. Nehemiah said a quiet prayer to God before answering.
8. He asked the king do send him to Judah in order to rebuild the city (v. 5).
9. The king then asked him how long his journey would be and when he would return.
10. When all was said and done, Artaxerxes granted Nehemiah all that he had

requested because as Nehemiah said, “the good hand of my God was on me” (v. 8).

Slide 5

C. HIS INSPECTION OF THE WALLS AND CHALLENGE TO THE PEOPLE (2:11-18)

1. After resting from his trip, Nehemiah went out at night to inspect the walls of Jerusalem.
2. He took a few men with him but did not tell anyone else what he was doing.
3. Nehemiah found everything just as his brother had said, “the walls . . . were broken down and [the] gates . . . were consumed by fire” (v. 13).
4. When he finally spoke to the people, he said, “You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates burned by fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we will no longer be a reproach” (v. 17).
5. “I told them how the hand of my God had been favorable to me and also about the king’s words which he had spoken to me. Then they said, “Let us arise and build.” So they put their hands to the good work.” (Nehemiah 2:18)
6. Before we look at the work on the wall, I would like to ask each of you a few questions:
 - a. Do you have a desire in your heart for the work God has called you to do?
 - b. Are you willing to sacrifice to see His will accomplished?
 - c. Are you willing to put your hand to the work?

Slide 6

III. What Is Necessary For The Work To Proceed

A. WE MUST KNOW THE PURPOSE OF THE WORK

1. One question that must first be answered is this, "Why are we doing this?"
2. Nehemiah had an important reason for rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem — the glory of God.
3. In 2:17, he said, "Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we will no longer be a reproach."
4. The Gentiles living around Jerusalem enjoyed mocking the Jewish neighbors because of the dilapidated condition of the city.
5. Many years earlier, the psalmist had praised Jerusalem for its beauty,
"Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion in the far north, the city of the great King." (Psalm 48:2)
6. Now the neighbors were asking, if your God, the great King, loves this city so much, why is it in this shape?
7. When it comes to the church, why do we carry out any kind of ministry?
8. The purpose of all ministry is the glory of God.
9. In John 17:4, John records these words which Jesus prayed in His prayer to His Father, "I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do."
10. Paul said in Ephesians 2:10, that you and I are "created in Christ Jesus for good works . . .", so all we do is to be for His glory.

6a**B. WE MUST KNOW THE PLAN OF OUR WORK**

1. Nehemiah was a man who planned his work and worked his plan.
2. Thirty-eight individual workers are named in this chapter; forty-two groups of people are also identified.
3. Each of them carried out a specific work on a designated part of the wall.
 - a. Some rebuilt the wall utilizing the stones which had been torn down.
 - b. Others "repaired" sections, making them stronger than they had previously been.

- c. Still others made new gates with the hardware to support and lock them.
4. As I have shared with you in previous lessons, every member of the church is important and has a special part to play within Christ's body.
5. Our elders are busy planning our work.
6. As we move through this year and the next, you may find yourself saying, "I didn't know we did that," or "I didn't know we offered this."
7. As they seek to involve us more and more in the different works of our church family, let's respond as did the prophet Isaiah long ago, "Here am I. Send me!" (Isaiah 6:8).

6b**C. WE MUST GET TO KNOW THE PEOPLE WITH WHOM WE WORK**

1. Too often, our tendency is to read through the list of workers in Nehemiah 3 so that we can get on to the more important parts of the book.
2. However, realize that the Holy Spirit inspired Nehemiah to record these names for a reason, or two.
 - a. One was so that later generations of the Jews could go back and see who helped to rebuild the wall.
 - b. Another reason is so that you and I may see the many kinds of people who worked in the rebuilding of the walls.
3. God used all kinds of people for this project:
 - a. Rulers and priests (vv. 1, 12-19)
 - b. Men and women (v. 12; "Shallum . . . and his daughters")
 - c. Professional craftsmen ("goldsmiths," "perfumers" v. 8; "merchants," v. 32)
 - d. People from outside the city (vv. 2, 5, 7).
4. One of the things I have enjoyed the most over my years of preaching the gospel is the privilege of getting to know the histories and talents of so many people who are part of God's family.
5. I want to encourage you learn more about those with whom you worship

and work — I believe you will be amazed at the people that God brings into His church.

Conclusion

1. No single person could have accomplished the work or rebuilding the walls and replacing the gates.
2. It took both leadership on Nehemiah's part and cooperation on the part of the people.
3. Everyone had a place to fill and a job to do.
4. The same is true for all of us here today: We must work together if we are to finish the work God has given us to His glory.

Slide 7

5. Long ago, the apostle Paul wrote, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58).