

**Christ Community Covenant Church,
Pursuing Jesus and His priorities in the world
Nehemiah 2:11-18
Pastor Dave Scherrer - January 12, 2014**

We continue in our study of Nehemiah as we stop to examine our pursuit of Christ. 4Cs has embarked on a new adventure; it is almost like we have been reborn. Do you feel the buzz? That is the excitement of a new day of opportunity that God has given us.

Last Thursday night 30 of us gathered to consider how we can be better at our ministry of First Impression and I know of several more who want to be involved but could not come that night. I am proud of us in Christ. Yesterday over 50 of us gathered to move the offices to 6757 Simms and our new digs. The work at the church has been a service of love and much has been done. There is still a lot to do to reach our February 1st deadline. We closed on December 20th, just about twenty days ago already and thousands of man hours of work have transformed that building into our new church.

But none of that matters unless we also look deep within ourselves and ask if we are pursuing Christ with all our heart and all our mind and all our strength. And the evidence of that passion can be seen in our pursuit of the priorities of Christ.

Pursuing Christ and His priorities in the world

Last week we learned that one of the foundational priorities of God is to redeem.

God's priority is Redemption

This is the good news! God takes our old rags and dresses us in regality. The *'Gospel of the Kingdom'* as Jesus put it is upon us and we need never fear the discipline of God ever again.

The book is the story of God redeeming creation and most importantly humans made in His image. Brought out of darkness into light, out of despair into hope and out of death and into life, we have been delivered from profound and universal depravity into God's glorious righteousness and most marvelous holiness by the person and work of the Son Jesus Christ.

But God has other priorities as well. Redemption is a pretty high brow theological term, so I want to turn our attention to another priority of God that is also foundational but I think far easier to understand. That is the idea that God's priority is community.

God's priority is Community

We were designed to be in community

We as a church made it important from our inception when we named ourselves Christ Community Covenant Church and I think that has been one of the hallmarks of this fellowship. Somehow we knew, from day one that community was to be part of our DNA helix. Maybe it is because we could see from scripture that community was important to God:

Genesis 2:18

Then the Lord God said, "***It is not good*** that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

⁹ Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. ¹⁰ For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! ¹¹ Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? ¹² And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

1 Corinthians 12:13-14

¹³ For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

¹⁴ For the body does not consist of one member but of many.

Community is critical to God and in a few minutes we will see what the reason is for this priority, but let's turn to our passage for our study and see what Nehemiah has to say. Turn to Chapter two with me and let's look at this interesting passage together:

Nehemiah 2:11-18

So I went to Jerusalem and was there three days. ¹² Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. And I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem. There was no animal with me but the one on which I rode. ¹³ I went out by night by the Valley Gate to the Dragon Spring and to the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that were broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire. ¹⁴ Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but there was no room for the animal that was under me to pass. ¹⁵ Then I went up in the night by the valley and inspected the wall, and I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned. ¹⁶ And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, and I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest who were to do the work.

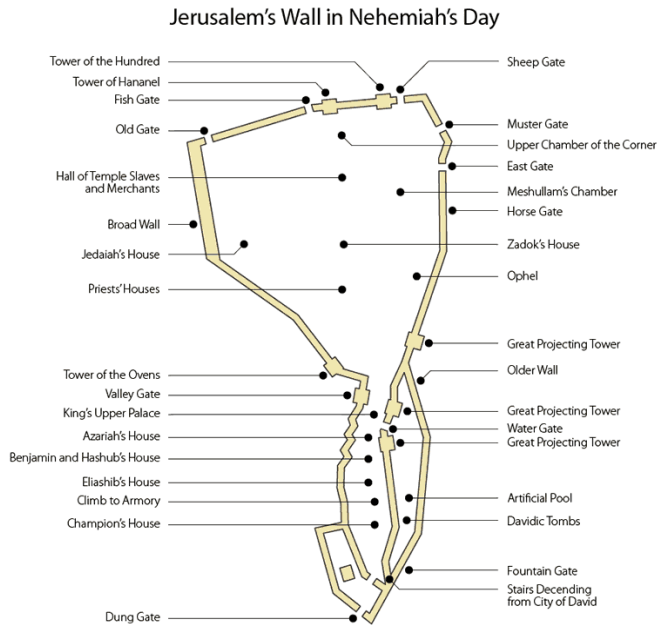
¹⁷ Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision." ¹⁸ And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me. And they said, "Let us rise up and build." So they strengthened their hands for the good work.

To help you get a visual for this project that the returning exiles and the Jews who have been in the area for three generations are committing themselves to. There are a couple of story lines here. This is a lot of work and for some 60 or 70 years. Some of the Jews that were left behind have been living in the area trying to make a go of it. Now this official who talks with a Persian accent is walking around making suggestions about rebuilding walls.

So it stands to reason that it might be tough to talk them into it. But Nehemiah comes with letters from the King of Persia that gives him timber and rock to build the walls. And after walking the city at night, Nehemiah shares his vision for the endangered community of the Hebrews to create a city from the rubble. When it is all said and done it will look something like this according to chapter 3.



Here is more of an architectural rendering of what the project looked like:



I think that there are at least three things that the priority of community provides, and first and foremost in this case community helps to establish protection. And interestingly enough, we see that the community serves to provide a protective factor for God's people. Remember how we read in Ecclesiastes 3 how two people can protect themselves better than one? A loving and watchful community can watch out for each other. God has a priority for community because there is protection for the people He loves.

Community for protection

Let's see how Nehemiah sees it:

Nehemiah 4:15-23

¹⁵ When our enemies heard that it was known to us and that God had frustrated their plan, we all returned to the wall, each to his work. ¹⁶ From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction, and half held the spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. And the leaders stood behind the whole house of Judah, ¹⁷ who were building on the wall. Those who carried burdens were loaded in such a way that each labored on the work with one hand and held his weapon with the other. ¹⁸ And each of the builders had his sword strapped at his side while he built. The man who sounded the trumpet was beside me. ¹⁹ And I said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, "The work is great and widely spread, and we are separated on the wall, far from one another. ²⁰ In the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us." ²¹ So we labored at the work, and half of them held the spears from the break of dawn until the stars came out. ²² I also said to the people at that time, "Let every man and his servant pass the night within Jerusalem, that they may be a guard for us by night and may labor by day." ²³ So neither I nor my brothers nor my servants nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us took off our clothes; each kept his weapon at his right hand.

But there is more for us. There is also the reality of encouragement that community gives us.

Community for encouragement

Let's take a look at an interesting chapter, the third chapter; you will see a lot of "and next to him" phrases.

Nehemiah 3: "And next to him . . ."

16 times we see the words "and next to him" or "and after that" another 13 times. Usually you simply skip these passages with all these difficult to pronounce names but God has a reason for including them. We see some heroic community happening here. Kind of what we saw yesterday. We were encouraging each other, working alongside each other for a common good. We were learning names, seeing people we didn't know contributing to our common welfare. I also find it interesting that God notes who didn't participate. In verse 5 we read "***And next to them the Tekoites repaired, but their nobles would not stoop to serve their Lord.***" It's ok; we will have another move day on the 25th!!

[And one interesting side bar: Verse 3:28 says:

"Above the Horse Gate the priests repaired, ***each one opposite his own house.***"

Life Groups thoughts

So we have seen that there is protection in community and encouragement in community but there is also correction in community. And that may seem kind of odd to you but it is important.

Community for correction

Nehemiah 5:6-12

⁶ I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these words. ⁷ I took counsel with myself, and I brought charges against the nobles and the officials. I said to them, "You are exacting interest, each from his brother." And I held a great assembly against them ⁸ and said to them, "We, as far as we are able, have bought back our Jewish brothers who have been sold to the nations, but you even sell your brothers that they may be sold to us!" They were silent and could not find a word to say. ⁹ So I said, "The thing that you are doing is not good. Ought you not to walk in the fear of our God to prevent the taunts of the nations our enemies?" ¹⁰ Moreover, I and my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain. Let us abandon this exacting of interest. ¹¹ Return to them this very day their fields, their vineyards, their olive orchards, and their houses, and the percentage of money, grain, wine, and oil that you have been exacting from them." ¹² Then they said, "We will restore these and require nothing from them. We will do as you say." And I called the priests and made them swear to do as they had promised.

Finally and most importantly, there is the idea that community is important to God and that God Himself has been in community since eternity. God has been in a dance with Himself as Father, Son and Spirit, and our well placed behavior of community gives God glory as a reflection of His character.

Community as a testimony to the character of God

I believe that the Trinity provides a model for belonging to a community, specifically the communities of the church as well as for society as a whole. Note that I use the term "belonging" in order to emphasize the activity of relating to others. ***Belonging to one another***, whether within a family, church or corporation, implies a deeper relationship or the activity of relating than simply living in the same cul-de-sac.

Based on scriptural accounts it appears that the community of the early church reflected the Trinitarian model of communion. However, throughout history the Christian community came to reflect more the political structures of the day than this original biblical model. As the church enters the 21st century I want to say that the pervasive influence of the media and social technology on our understanding of human nature and belonging has been just short of devastating. The world is well aware of the human yearning for belonging and currently attempts to capitalize on it for purposes of making money. I want to argue that, in sharp contrast, the communion of the divine Trinity provides a model for belonging where equity is given and submission in love the rule which is faithful to the dignity and purpose of human beings as intended by God.

John 13:35

³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

In the beginning the Church was foremost a fellowship of men and women who centered their lives on the living Christ. They had a personal and vital relationship to the Lord and they sacrificed for each other. It transformed them and the world around them. Then the Church moved to Greece, and it became a philosophy. Later it moved to Rome, and it became an institution. Next it moved to Europe and it became a culture. Finally it moved to America, and it became an enterprise. We've got far too many churches and so few fellowships. ~ Richard Halverson, former U.S. Senate Chaplain

Looking forward 4Cs will be increasingly about redemption and about community because we are pursuing Christ and His priorities in the world.