

**SHARING LIFE AT FIRST BY PASTOR BOB BENDER ON MARCH 5, 2017**  
**“ARISE AND BUILD!” FROM NEHEMIAH 2:8-20**  
**LAUNCHING INTO LEADERSHIP NEHEMIAH LIFE MESSAGE SERIES**

Today, I want to spend a little time with you talking about “Arise and Build!” from our stellar leader, Nehemiah, in his autobiography. Everyone in this room who is worth anything wants to do or build something great for God. Our big idea for today is this: Successful leaders build great things for God using the resources God has provided for them and avoiding others, as we shall see.

A university president once said that there are three kinds of people in the world: those who don’t know what’s happening, those who watch what’s happening, and those who make things happen! (Gene Getz, *Nehemiah*, p. 36). Nehemiah was one of those who made things happen. Let’s see how he did it as we continue our story of one of the greatest leaders who lived, in Nehemiah 2:8-20. We will unpack verse 20 which summarizes the whole passage.

**/ARISE AND BUILD: WE CAN COUNT ON GOD— “The God of heaven will give us success”**  
**(V. 20A)**

Make no mistake about it; God is in the building business (Eccl. 3:3b, Ps. 127:1, Mt. 7:24, Mt. 16:18, Acts 20:32, Eph. 2:22, Heb. 11:10). He is building His kingdom, churches, families, lives, and yes— even buildings. If Solomon’s temple was built today, it would cost approximately \$150B! How could Nehemiah say confidently in verse 20 that, “The God of heaven will give us success?” Because he had already stated, “the good hand of my God was on me” in verse 8.

What does the hand of God represent? It represents His blessing, as Jabez equates the two in his prayer in 1 Chron. 4:10. God had already blessed Nehemiah with protection and provision and would continue to do so with His presence and power. What is God’s hand of blessing? A blessing is a sovereign act of God by which He causes something/someone to supernaturally produce more than is possible. This definition is seen in His blessing upon Abraham— “I will bless you so you will be a blessing and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed” (Gen. 12:2). Surely, we are blessed to sit here today as a fulfillment of that promise. Blessing is also reflected in the fact that the Old Testament patriarchs would take their hands and place it over their children—normally the firstborn—and speak a blessing over them. That is why Esau was so upset that Jacob had received Isaac’s blessing. Believe it or not, God wants to bless you! First Peter 3:9 says, “For you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.”

Now all of us have dreams and visions. How do we know we can count on God to fulfill that particular dream or vision or if it is even from God? We can count on God to give us the desires of our hearts (Ps. 37:4). We can count on God to answer our prayers (Ja. 1:5). We can count on God to lead us by His Holy Spirit. We can count on God to speak to us through godly counsel. We can count on God to speak to us through his Word. We can count on God to open doors for us. As many of these components as we can get to line up gives us the confidence we can count on God to accomplish any specific endeavor.

In order to arise and build, we must have the confidence that God wants to bless it. Moses prayed in Gen. 33:15, “If Your presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here.” We can count on God to fulfill His purposes, “Many plans are in a person’s heart, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails” (Pr. 19:21). We can count on God’s will being “good, acceptable, and perfect” (Ro. 12:2). We can count on God because He has already taken the initiative. We can count on God Who has given to us resources to help us to arise and build (Ph. 4:19). We can count on God’s revealed will the Scriptures. We can count on God’s presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We can count on God’s answers to our prayers (Jer. 33:3). We can count on God Who has set before us open doors of opportunity (Rev. 3:8). We can count

on God Who is for us— “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom 8:31). We can count on God’s great plans for us— “For I know the plans that I have for you... to give you a future and a hope” (Jer. 29:11). We can count on God to do much more; “Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works within us” (Eph. 3:20). We can count on God to give us success in any endeavor we seek if it is God-honoring. We can count on God; can God count on us?

**//ARISE AND BUILD: GOD CAN COUNT ON US— “Therefore we His servants will arise and build” (V. 20B)**

God could count on us to do what? 1. Investigate— do your homework (vv. 11-16). Get your facts. Knowledge is power. Poor planning leads to a pitiful performance. Plan ahead and leave enough space on the whiteboard for the “D.” 2. Cooperate for teamwork (vv. 17-18a). “One chases a 1000 to flight but two chase 10,000 to flight” (Deut. 32:30). 3. Orchestrate God’s handiwork (v. 18b). Now you can hear the music play! Great music is heard when an accomplished musician has the right instrument. God is the player; we are instruments in His hands. Notice verse 8 speaks of the good hand of God being on Nehemiah to accomplish His good work. In verse 18, they put their hands to the good work. God’s hands use our hands. “We are workers together with God” (1 Cor. 3:9).

“The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad” (Ps. 126:3). God has done great things here at FBC! Why is God blessing? Does God just bless arbitrarily? If you want to know why the hand of God was upon Nehemiah or upon any church, turn to Revelation 3:8. This Philadelphia church was blessed as God had set before them an open door while others seemed to have a closed door. Adrian Rogers said, “Is it because God has favorites? No, but God does have intimates. Our God is the keeper of the keys. When He opens a door, there are not enough demons in Hell to shut it. And, when He shuts the door, there are not enough angels in Heaven to kick it open. He is the One who opens doors and He’s the One who closes doors in your personal life, in your business, in your family, in this church.”<sup>1</sup>

Jesus tells them why He has an open door for them— their (good and hard) work (v. 8a). These folks were available to God to do His work— just like the people in Nehemiah 2 and just like us. Two troubled young teenagers lived in Dallas, TX. Both of them had a Sunday school teacher. The Sunday school teacher of one of these boys visited him again and again. He wouldn’t let up on him and finally led him to Jesus. I am speaking of Dr. Jim Ponder, former Director of Evangelism in the Florida Baptist Convention. The other boy had a teacher as well, but his teacher said, “I don’t want that kind of a boy in my class” and, didn’t pursue him. That other boy’s name: Lee Harvey Oswald, who assassinated John Fitzgerald Kennedy. Two boys; two Sunday School teachers; one teacher did the work God had called him to do and was blessed; the other refused to work and the world was cursed.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus goes on to include three aspects of their work (and ours): 1. They embraced the Spirit of God (v. 8b)— “a little power.” This word (dynamite in Greek) is used 120 times in the NT— mostly of God’s power in the Holy Spirit. They were open to the Holy Spirit’s work— just like us. 2. They embraced the Word of God (v. 8c). This was a Bible believing, Bible preaching, Bible teaching church— just like ours. 3. They embraced the Son of God (v. 8d). They were dedicated to the Lord Jesus in making His name great—just like us. If we continue to make ourselves available to the work of God, God will bless!

Take any entity— church, person, family, ministry, or business that is committed to these values then God will say; “I will give to them an open door. And when I open that door, no one can shut it. And, when I shut it, no one can open it.” And I believe that’s the reason that Nehemiah had the good hand of God upon him. God doesn’t just act capriciously but according to His principles and promises.

We see a personal application of this principle of blessing as Jesus feeds the 5000 in Matthew 14. As we follow Jesus' pattern in blessing, we can be assured that we can be in a position for a blessing. God wants to bless you. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount began with a series of blessings. In order for us to count on God to bless us, we must be in the right position for Him to do so, just like Nehemiah. God doesn't bless everyone equally. He reserves his greatest blessings for those who cooperate with Him. Again, a blessing is a sovereign act of God by which He causes something/someone to supernaturally produce more than is possible.

How can I get in on God's hand of blessing (Mt. 14:15-21)? 1. Present all you are to God (v. 18). The boy who gave the fish and loaves received the greatest blessing that day. 2. Position yourself for a blessing (v. 19a; Acts 3:5). 3. Seek God's perspective (v. 19b). 4. Pray and ask God for a blessing (v. 19c); 1 Chron. 4:10. 5. Be willing to be broken and then used (v. 19d). Nehemiah was broken over the condition of the walls and because of his brokenness, God used him. 6. Receive your blessing to overflowing (v. 20). In this story and others like it, God is not limited by the size of your need, the cause of your need, or even the lack of human resources available. He will bless if we position ourselves for it.

I don't know what God is going to build in and through your life, but whatever it is these principles apply. Is it a business? Arise and build! Is it an education? Arise and build! Is it a marriage or family? Arise and build! Is it your ministry? Arise and build! Is it a position of service or work in our church? Arise and build! Is it a new church home? Arise and build! Is it our children's building? Arise and build!

How many of you have been to a pastor's ordination service? One of the things the ordained do to the candidate is that they lean down, place their hands on him, and whisper into his ear a prayer or encouraging word. Have you wondered what those guys were saying to him? I'll tell you the advice they gave me, "Bob, don't ever start a building program" (Just kidding!).

Building programs get a bad reputation. Many churches have split over them and oftentimes the leadership has to go it alone for a season. Tonto and the Lone Ranger were riding through a canyon when they noticed an Indian war party of about 100 looking down on them from every side. The Lone Ranger said, "What are we going to do?" To which Tonto replied, "What do you mean, **we**, Paleface?"

Our Children's Building is my third major building program in the last 15 years and they all have been nothing but a joy. Were there challenges? Certainly, but what a joy to be a part of building something great for God. When we built this building, the builder said, "Every church I have built a building for doubled in attendance after they occupied it." I thought, "Great; thanks for the high expectations!"

Combining these two principles, we embrace the proper balance between counting on God's hand to be with us—divine enablement—and allowing Him to use our human resources: our own talents and abilities—putting our hands to the good work. It takes both God's hands and our hands fully embracing God's sovereignty and our responsibility. We pray and prepare. God's hands work through our hands.

**///ARISE AND BUILD: OTHERS CAN BE COUNTED OUT— "But you have no portion, right or memorial in Jerusalem" (V. 20C)**

Nehemiah's greatest challenge was not the project; it was people. He had to convince the people to tackle this project and not everybody bought into it. Now regrettably today not everyone gets in the flow of God's blessings. Verses 9-10 introduce us to the first two adversaries. Verses 19-20 tell the rest of the story of Sanballat and Tobiah. Notice they added Geshem, who was the top dog of Saudi Arabia. So Sanballat and Tobiah enlisted some more help to oppose the work of God—just like the devil. They tried to use outdated information to achieve their own selfish goals as they referred to Artaxerxes' previous ban on building Ezra 15 years earlier.

The greater the work of God, the greater the opposition to it will be. God says, “Arise and build;” the devil says, “Arise and bar it from happening.” Jesus had his Judas; John had his Diotrefes; Moses had his Miriam; Joshua had his Achan; Paul had his Demas; Peter had his Ananias and Sapphira. A farmer was asked how he managed to have so much crop when his field was full of tree stumps. He said, “Oh, I just plow around them.” There are always going to be stumps; plow around them. Don’t worry about them; certainly, don’t legitimize them. Sid Spears was a wealthy rancher in my last church. He would tell the young pastors there when they would confide in him concerning opposition in the church as he took them out to his ranch. “See that cow chip there? Now, if I just walk by it, it doesn’t bother anybody, but if I kick it, guess what? It causes a stink! So just leave those guys alone and don’t cause a stink!”

Proverbs 18:21— “Death and life are in the power of the tongue and those who eat of it taste their fruit.” Stay away from the death breathers! They will suck the life right out of you. Mark Twain wrote, “Keep away from those who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great make you believe that you too can become great.”

A freshman of Amherst College put over the door of his dormitory room the letter V. Because of it he endured all sorts of ridicule and withstood questioning. But he paid no attention to either, nor would he disclose the secret of the letter. When his four years were over, and graduation day came, that student was appointed to deliver the valedictory. Then the mystery of that letter V was revealed. It stood for valedictorian. That letter on the door held before him during his four years the ideal that he had set for himself.<sup>2</sup> What is your dream? Don’t let the death breathers steal your dream or vision.

You see, you don’t have to miss out like Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem. They could have gotten into God’s work if they would have changed their tune. Be like the Amherst College student and not like the evil triumvirate and arise and build.

Romans 13:11 tells us to awaken out of our sleep! Arise and build! The hardest part of an endeavor is getting started. A sitting train locomotive can be halted with a 1 inch block of wood in front of the first wheel and cannot overcome it to get started. That same locomotive cannot be stopped at 55 mph even by a 10-foot concrete wall. So, get up and get going! Revelation 3:3 says; “So remember what you have received and heard and keep it and repent. Therefore, if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief...”

What’s on your radar today that this message intersects? Do you need to be a more loving husband or cooperative wife or more engaging parent or more obedient child? Arise and build! Do you need to step up to the plate in our church to work or give to the children’s building? Arise and build! Do you have a business or educational challenge? Arise and build! Do you have a relational challenge? Arise and build! Do you need to walk down this aisle this morning to settle your relationship with God regarding salvation, deciding for ministry or missions, awaken out of your backslidden sleepiness, or to join us here? To do any of these is to put yourself in a position of blessing. Arise and build!

<sup>1</sup><https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/let-us-arise-and-build-adrian-rogers-sermon-on-god-brings-purpose-162267?page=11>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/god-honoring-ambition-andy-flowers-sermon-on-ambition-132851?page=6>

**Central Idea of Text (CIT):** Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem and begins the rebuilding project.

**Big Idea of Message (BIM):** Successful leaders build great things for God.

**Major Objective (MO):** Commitment

**Specific Objective (SP):** That leaders build great things for God using the resources He has enabled us to use (and some He hasn’t).

**Primary Addressed Need (PAN):** How can I build great things for God?