Wheelersburg Baptist Church 11/17/10
Series: *"Facing the Past, Moving Ahead for God's Honor: Nehemiah"*
Current study: Nehemiah 7:4-73

All Scripture is God breathed and profitable. Do you agree? How about a list of names we struggle to pronounce? Like the list in Nehemiah 7? Yes, it's from God and it is profitable as we'll see.

Tonight, after a two week break while I was in Eastern Europe (and thanks to Jack and Aaron for teaching!), we return to our study of Nehemiah. Let's review what we've learned thus far…

The Setting:
--5th century B.C.
--Jews went into captivity in Babylon over 150 years earlier
--Some had returned to Israel, as God promised, 80 or so years before
--Ezra led the Jews in rebuilding the temple
--Problem: The city of Jerusalem was defenseless and unsuitable for decent living

The Flow of the book of Nehemiah:
--Ch 1: Nehemiah found out about the problem and prayed about it.
--Ch 2: Nehemiah took action by approaching the King; God answered his prayer…
--Ch 3: We meet the builders of the wall. The people worked on various sections.
--Ch 4: The project faced opposition…
--Ch 5: Nehemiah faced a different sort of problem, an *internal* one. Some of the Jews were in debt due to the financial strains of the building project. Others were taking advantage of their own people…
--Ch 6: Nehemiah faced further opposition, this time more subtle. The enemy tried to distract him and even blackmail him. Some of Nehemiah's own people were hoodwinked by the deceptive tactics of Tobiah (19).
--Ch 7 (1-3): The wall project is finished, the gates set in place, and new leadership appointed in Jerusalem.

So there's the setting. The wall is in place, the project completed. God gave His people everything they needed to do the work He wanted them to do. He had given them protection, wisdom, skill, and strength.

Now what? What's next? Know this. *The wall is a means to an end.*

It's easy for God's people to view the *means* as an *end*, that is, as the goal itself. It's easy for God's people to devote themselves to a God-given task, and yet forget the overall reason for the task.

E.g.—Preparing and preaching a sermon or Sunday School lesson is a means to something, not an end. So is building and caring for a church building. And having youth events. We're in trouble when we think that the means is the end.

Discuss: What was the goal for Nehemiah's building project? Why did God want a wall in place around Jerusalem?

Application: So often we, too, are prone to view the *means* as an *end* in itself. Let's think of some examples.

#1: A church building project—Many churches experience a "let down" after completing a new building. They pull together to get the building up, but then… What's the goal a church must keep in mind?

#2: Individual Christians can forget the goal—We pray for health, good families, jobs, etc. And that's fine. But why does God give us these things? He doesn't give us these as *ends* to hoard, but as *tools (means)* to use. Use for what? To bring glory to Himself, ultimately, and good to others. The goal is *not* self-fulfillment, but His glory.

Now let's examine the text. Let's notice what Nehemiah did *after* he finished the project…

I. Nehemiah discovered another problem (4).

    A. He observed what the city possessed (4a).

        Q: What?

    B. He observed what the city lacked (4b).

        Two things…

        1. There was a need for people.

            Why was there a lack of people?

        2. There was a need for houses.

II. Nehemiah took action to address the problem (5).

But not on his own…

    A. God gave him a plan.

        Notice how real God was in Nehemiah's life. He was sensitive to God's will and leading.

        Q: What was the plan?

    B. Nehemiah carried out the plan.

        We won't see the actual fulfillment of the plan until chapter 11, but here we see the research involved that led to its implementation…

III. Nehemiah recorded his research (6-73).

    A. He listed the people (6-69).

        Q: What was true of the people in the following list? These are the one who were the "first to return" from exile (5). There were others (Nehemiah and his entourage, for example).

        The list includes Jews in some cases by ancestor names (8-25), and in other cases by town location (26-42). Other groups are listed by occupation (43ff.).

        Note: A very similar list appears in Ezra 2.

        1. The list included the leaders (6-7).

            Q: Notice, where did these leaders return to? Verse 6 "Each to his own town." This will be significant later.

        2. The list included the men of Israel (8-38).

            The list also includes numbers. Why the numbers? Is God interested in numbers?

        3. The list included the priests (39-42).
        4. The list included the Levites (43).
        5. The list included the singers (44).
        6. The list included the gatekeepers (45).
        7. The list included the temple servants (46-56).
        8. The list included the descendants of Solomon's servants (57-60).
        9. The list included some people who could not prove their ancestry (61-65).
            Q: Why was that a problem?
            Q: What did they try to do according to verse 64?
            Q: What solution did the governor come up with? Verse 65

B. He summarized the list (66-69).
        1. He explains how many made the trip (66-67).
            Q: How many?
        2. He explains how they made the trip (68-69).
            Note that Nehemiah even listed the mode of transportation utilized!

C. He listed the provisions (70-72).
        1. He tells what was given.
            Q: Such as what?
        2. He tells who gave it.
            Q: What types of people participated in the giving?

D. He tells what the people did when they returned (73).
        1. They settled in their towns.
            Don't miss the end of verse 73, "their own towns." And since that was the case…
        2. That meant Jerusalem was in need.
            How so? The large city was sparsely inhabited. Why is that a problem?

Implications:
1. The account teaches us about how God works with His people.
      Discuss: What do we learn?
      God gives us enough light for today's decisions. Tomorrow's light will be available tomorrow. God didn't tell Nehemiah before he built the wall what he would need to do *afterwards*. After the project was completed, God "put it into my heart to assemble the nobles," according to Nehemiah.
      To do: Share examples of this principle in our lives

*2. The account teaches us about **stewardship**.*
      Discuss: How so?
      Key: When God gives us something, we must always ask, "What does He want me to do with it?"
      Discuss: What other passages shed light on the subject of stewardship? See 1 Corinthians 4:1-5; Luke 12:35-48; 19:11-27