

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
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**KEYS TO OBEDIENCE**

Nehemiah 11 and 12

August 27, 2023

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There are three points to today's sermon.

- Go where God wants you to go.
- Do what God wants you to do.
- Trust God with the results.

Before we begin our lesson, let's recap what we have learned in Nehemiah. As the story has progressed, I have tried not to let the summary get longer, so here is my summary of the previous summaries:

- The walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt in less than two months because everyone worked together and because God was in the project.
- Nehemiah was God's man for the times. He oversaw the whole project and dealt with enemies outside of Jerusalem and enemies within Jerusalem.
- He appointed people to be in charge, set up rules for guarding the city, and conducted a census to determine resources and manpower.
- After the wall was complete, the people had a spiritual awakening. God's Law was read aloud and people wept, repented of their sins, and recommitted themselves to God.
- The people spent time recapping the faithfulness of God to the nation of Israel and remembering their own unfaithfulness.
- They signed a covenant with God promising to obey the law and to care for his house.

**1-GO WHERE GOD WANTS YOU TO GO**

**SCRIPTURE:** Nehemiah 11:1-2

*Now the leaders of the people settled in Jerusalem. The rest of the people cast lots*

*to bring one out of every ten of them to live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while the remaining nine were to stay in their own towns.* <sup>2</sup> *The people commended all who volunteered to live in Jerusalem.*

**EXPLANATION:** The walls and the temple were built and back in order, but much of the city was still in disarray. Most of the people lived outside the city limits. In order for Jerusalem to thrive, people had to inhabit it. The leaders agreed to settle in Jerusalem, and the people cast lots to see which ones would move into town. At first glance, we may not give appropriate consideration to this sacrifice, but consider this.

- It's not easy packing up everything and moving to a new place.
- What would you say if today, in church, we drew straws to see which of us would move into an apartment on Broadway or Demonbreun for the sake of the Lord's work?
- How would you react if God asked you to exchange your current life for one that was a little more dangerous, a little more uncertain, a little more uncomfortable?

**APPLICATION:** The Bible tells us that these people who moved into Jerusalem were commended. God thought that they were important enough that he recorded their family names in his word. For what? Why are they remembered? It is not for some heroic deed. It's not for some valiant effort. They did not kill a thousand foes or win a thousand friends. They moved from one location to another in obedience to God's will for their lives.

One Biblical commentator wrote, "Never underestimate the importance of simply being physically present in the place where God wants you. You may not be asked to perform some dramatic ministry, but simply being there is a ministry." So if you are struggling with God's will for your life, how about starting with just being present?

Obedience starts with being in the place God wants you to be. It's not important why he wants you there. It's not your job to worry about what he's going to do with you when you get there. Your job is to obey.

- Go where God wants you to go.

## 2-DO WHAT GOD WANTS YOU TO DO

**SCRIPTURE:** Nehemiah 11:3-4/15-17

*These are the provincial leaders who settled in Jerusalem (now some Israelites, **priests**, Levites, **temple servants** and descendants of Solomon's servants lived in the towns of Judah, each on their own property in the various towns, <sup>4</sup> while other people from both Judah and Benjamin lived in Jerusalem):*

Then the scripture goes on to tell us some of the people who moved into the city and what their roles would be.

**EXPLANATION:** The book of Nehemiah is chock full of names, and we might be tempted to just glance right over all those lists. However, I think it's important to slow down and read through them on occasion. God recorded those names for a reason. He wants us to remember the people behind the stories. Detailed studies of names reveal fascinating information. Through such studies, we learn how a person was connected in other Bible stories.

In chapters 11 and 12, we read lots of names of lots of individuals who made the move to Jerusalem. I think it's interesting to look at the disparity represented here. There were priests. There were temple servants. There were those who worked outside the house of God—maybe gardeners, carpenters? There were musicians and worship leaders. Some of them came from a more famous lineage. Some were servants. Some were common folk. In Jerusalem, they would each continue to use their individual skills to contribute to the rebuilding of the holy city.

**ILLUSTRATION:** In 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 5, there is a story of Naaman, the commander of a great army. Naaman was a leper. Leprosy is a terrible disease. It kills you by destroying one piece of your body at a time. At this time in history, lepers were usually excluded from contact with other humans. They would eventually be isolated from everyone, including the ones they loved the most. But Naaman's servant girl took pity on him and told him to go to the prophet of God for healing. Naaman took her advice and went a great distance to see the prophet, Elisha, but Elisha did not even bother to meet him. Elisha sent a message through his servant. He told Naaman to wash himself seven times in the Jordan River to be healed.

Instead of being pleased, Naaman was angry. He was a proud man and could not believe that Elisha showed so little respect. He was also unimpressed by Elisha's instructions. "Why should I wash in Jordan River?" he asked. "I have better rivers back home." Thankfully, Naaman's servants were wiser than him. They said, "If the prophet had told you to do something great, you would have done it. Why not do what he says and be healed?" Naaman relented and did what he was told, and he was indeed healed.

**APPLICATION:** So often we get this mixed-up idea about God's will. Half the time we want to do great things for the kingdom, and the other half of the time we are like Naaman. We argue with God about the little things we should do. Colossians 3:23 says, "*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters.*"

Each and every person in the body of Christ has a job to do, and there are no small jobs. No job is greater or lesser than another. There's no sitting on the bench on God's team. Every person is a contributing member—or should be.

People from different families, from different classes, with different skills came to Jerusalem to perform different jobs. They were obedient and blessed because of their obedience. To be obedient, you must

- Go where God wants you to go.
- Do what God wants you to do.

### **3-TRUST GOD WITH THE RESULTS**

Nehemiah 11:27 through 43 talks about the massive celebration upon the completion and dedication of the wall:

- The Levites celebrated with songs of thanksgiving with musical instruments.
- The priests and Levites led purification ceremonies.
- There were two large choirs who sang songs of thanks. The two choirs walked and sang in opposite directions around the city.
- Verse 43 says *The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away.*

**EXPLANATION:** Nehemiah and the other leaders organized a great celebration to dedicate the wall. Part of the celebration involved a parade, but the people did not

march through the middle of Jerusalem. They did not march around the walls. They marched on top of the newly rebuilt walls.

If you remember, in Nehemiah 4:3, Tobiah the Ammonite, one of the enemies of Jerusalem, mocked the builders. He made fun of their efforts and said that even a fox climbing up on the walls would cause them to crumble. How good it must have felt to have stood on those very walls, to have jumped and shouted and marched around shouting with joy. These were not particle-board walls that were hastily constructed and easily torn down. Yes, the walls had been built in record time, but they were thick and sturdy, and they fortified the city. While they had provided the materials and the labor, the people knew that the credit belonged to the Lord.

**APPLICATION:** We are a people consumed with results, so much so that we want to know the bottom line before we begin. We want the Reader’s Digest version, the last page of the story without reading the entire book. We want the product already assembled. But seldom does God work that way.

- In the beginning, he does not usually show us the big picture or reveal the plot twist.
- He wants us to step out in faith without knowing the final score.
- He wants us to give our time and our talents and our resources and trust him with the results.

The better we know God, the more we understand Romans 8:28, “*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*”

We do not have to see the finished product from the start. We know that God is going to work it all out exactly how he sees fit. Our job is to obey. At the beginning of the message today, I shared with you the title: Keys to Obedience and I told you the three things we glean from this section in the book of Nehemiah:

- Go where God wants us to go.
- Do what God wants us to do.
- Trust God with the results.

## INVITATION:

- Maybe you are a child of God, and you are struggling with feeling insignificant in the kingdom of Christ. God wants you to know that he loves you. He sees those who serve him. He knows our names and our efforts. Even if no one else appreciates what we do or acknowledges our contributions, he knows, and that is enough. Keep obeying.
- But maybe obedience is the problem. Maybe you are one of God's children, but you are not fulfilling your responsibilities to the kingdom cause. Remember, it's never too late. God is calling you to walk in obedience. He wants our lives to glorify him.
- Or maybe you do not know God, or at least not in a personal way. Can I encourage you not to wait? Jesus loves you, enough to die for you, to pay for your sins. He has a plan and a purpose for your life. He wants your name recorded in his book of life. Your first step of obedience is to answer his call to your heart. The altar is open if you want to come pray.

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

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