

Service Overview

Speaker: Chris

Sermon Series: One From the Heart

Message: Building Towards Vision

Scripture Reference: Nehemiah 3

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Service Welcome *Speaker: Worship Team*

Good morning, everyone, and welcome to church. It's good to have you here on this very cold, chilly morning. I was really encouraged this week seeing the all the kids here for the holiday program, which I'm sure we're going to get a briefing on a bit later.

But what a thrill to see kids worshiping Jesus, honestly. Like, it's the most exciting thing to me, seeing kids singing 'Jesus number one, right at the top where he belongs, who he is and what he's done. Make Jesus number one.' You know, they were really getting into it, so it was a real thrill.

So we get to join in that spirit of worship that the kids have been engaging in this week. I was just going to encourage you that actually, the praise, the worship of children is really scriptural, right? Psalm 8: 2, *'through the praise of children and infants, you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.'* I love that children have a powerful voice, so we must really encourage them to worship. So let's stand up together, and we're going to sing.

Worship Singing

Song: Great Things by Jonas Myrin, Paul Wickham

Song: Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone) by Chris Tomlin, John Newton, Louie Giglio

Song: A Thousand Hallelujahs by Brooke Ligertwood

Song: Awesome God by Rich Mullins

Song: Text here

Post-Worship Prayer *Speaker: Stephen Bates*

God, as we're gathered here this morning, and we lift our voices and our hearts to you, I pray that we would be just so aware of your presence here by Holy Spirit. And I pray that we would also be aware of one another, that we come as your people to lift you high and worship, and to bring strength and encouragement to one another.

And so in our gathering here this morning, Lord, I do pray that what we offer to you is our very selves, our lives. Not just an hour and a quarter, but our very lives. And this is just simply an expression of our love and obedience and adoration of you. And I pray, Lord, that each one of us would leave this place now richer for the experience of being in your presence and in the presence of one another, that speaks to us by the spirit. Teach us through your word and encourage us, and by being together for your glory. Lord, we ask this. Amen.

Welcome & Kids Holiday Program Recap *Speaker: Stephen Bates & Mireille*

You would hardly believe that we had a spaceship here, but we definitely had liftoff. The weather was awesome, and we had 136 children here, all gunning for God, and we had 41 ladies leading them, with 7 people in the kitchen and at the cafe. It was huge.

But it just went so well. Out of the 136, we had a clean sweep of kids who wanted to declare that God is number one and who wanted to have Jesus as number one of their lives. 4 of them had not had the experience a church background, and they came to understand that gospel for the first time and made that commitment to follow Jesus.

So that was just a seed that has been planted in them, and all the others are just, you know, still being disciplined along that journey and coming to a better understanding of the gospel for themselves. So I'm just overwhelmed by all the joy that was absolutely here. You're going to see it in a in a little while in the slideshow, too.

Also, our serving team this year was very young. The oldest member of our team was 23, excluding me, and I think the youngest was 13. So, the median age would have been like, I don't know, 17. And we had 16-year-olds up here leading the kids in Cosmic Groove, teaching them dance. We had an 18-year-old was running the drama team of around eight actors. We had another 18-year-old doing the gospel talks in the middle of the program days. And they just did so well.

There was a whole bunch of ladies who were leading for the first time, who were on the other side of the program, now no longer participating, but, now leading, and making that change in their head to, 'I'm now serving and getting the message of God out there.' And so this board at the front is filled with notes that they wrote. It was set up to be space where they could record Jesus experiences about each other, about where they saw community, where they saw next steps for their kids, the things that they wanted to pray into.

So I invite you at the end of the service to come and just read some of the things that the kids have written here, throughout the week in their leadership. Also, that harder discipleship really comes through. Like, for example, we had a new guy on the sound and this person has written, 'James* is doing an amazing job at the sound desk.' Here's another one for Ash*, 'joining in on prayer for the first time.'

So, yeah, the kids understood what they were hearing about. So just come up and read these notes. They really speak of the heart of the leaders for the program. And just, thank you, church. Thank you for all the hands you blessed us with baking and prayer, and just time and kids and friends and neighbours.

We had a new generation of kindergarten kids who had their first time at their program, wonderstruck and looking around in awe,, enjoying the songs and seeing the older kids. But we also had the year sixes on the way out as well, and I had parents who came and thanked me, saying, 'this will be their last one', but they know everything that is available for them at PBC, like youth group. This church has been a real light to the community. They know what is here and they can come back for those things.

Announcements & Upcoming Events *Speaker: Stephen Bates & Ben*

Stephen: We have a number of things coming up that just very quickly want to tell you about. Firstly, if you are new to the life of Parramatta Baptist Church, welcome. I trust that you do feel welcome. And we would love just to let you know a little bit more about who we are as a church. So on the 28th of July, in 2 weeks' time, in the afternoon, you're welcome to come to afternoon tea with us. Just talk to Reuben or myself, or even better, send us your email. Put it on a card up the back, pop it in the letterbox there, and I will get in contact with you. We'd just love to meet you and for you to find out more about who we are.

We also have a women's event coming up on Saturday the 10th of August. There's a table out there, and all the women will get given something either during welcoming or on the way out of the service. So please, keep that date free. I'd love to have you along.

The other thing I do want to speak just a little bit longer about is something that we've done in the life of our church for many years now. It's called 'life in the spirit.' And it's something that has become such an important part of Parramatta Baptist Church. There are many of us who have done it, and there are many of us who have actually done it more than once as well.

It's a 10 week course split across two 5 week segments. It talks about the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, but also in the life of the church. And what we find is often there's a lack of understanding about who the Holy Spirit is and what he does. Sometimes you might hear about the Holy Spirit being called, like it's some weird thing, but he's not, he's part of the Trinity. He's part of the Godhead. And there's this lack of understanding.

So this 'life in the spirit' course is a way of actually learning more about who he is in your life, and his work in this world. It is a really good course, and I cannot commend it to you enough. It is a time of self-learning, so there will be daily listening and reading to be done. This is being reworked, so if you've done it before, I'd encourage you to come back and do the new version that's coming out.

It's not that the content is changed, but the way it will be delivered is, and there's also the group learning as well that happens on Wednesday evenings. Like I said, it will run for 5 weeks from the 28th of August and then the first 5 weeks of Term 4 as well. If you have not done this or if you are new to the life of Parramatta Baptist, I'd really encourage you to sign up for that. You can do that through our website, and you can also do it through our e-newsletter. But we are looking at trying to get registrations now. So please be involved with that. Tim* and the team had a wonderful job in not only preparing the material, but also facilitating those 10 weeks.

Now Ben, you want to come talk to us young adults, right?

Ben: Absolutely. Thank you. Hey, my name is Ben, I'm one of the pastors here, and I wanted to come and just speak a little bit into our young adult space, knowing that we don't actually talk about it a whole lot. But there's two events that are coming up in our young adult calendar that I would love for people to be aware of. And, if you are going to come to it, to come to it, and if you aren't going to come to it, to be praying over the young adults in these spaces.

'What is a young adult?' is a really good question, and I'm not sure that we have an answer to that yet. Some people pick an age range, but I like to think of it more as a life stage, of people who are leaving school, working out what adult life looks like, getting locked into what their future is going to be, going through uni, jumping into the workforce, whatever that looks like for them.

And so there's lots of questions that young adults kind of share together. We group them together because we're kind of wrestling with similar life questions at the moment. There's also wonderful excitement when it comes to faith and choosing, 'how am I going to live out a life of service of God with the rest of my adult life?' And so, we are really intentional to make sure that we gather together every week. We have small groups meeting in homes opening the Bible together. And that is just a really life giving space. It's kind of the core of a young adult ministry.

But here are two other specific events. This one up on the screen that popped up behind me, is an upcoming young adult gathering. So each term this is kind of something semi-new. And we've done one, near the beginning of every term, where we're going to bring all of our young adults into a room together, and we're going to do three things. We're going to eat some food together, hang out and we're going to worship God together. This is just a wonderful moment of unity, and also fixing our eyes collectively on Christ.

And then thirdly, we're going to unpack an element of discipleship. We're not going to unpack everything. And then we're going to try and get really specific. And so this one that's happening on August 3rd, which is only a few weeks away and we're going to be unpacking the concept of ecclesiology of church. Biblically, why do we gather? What is the kind of gathering that God calls us to? And the way that we going to do this is that we'll share a little bit from the web. I've invited Stephen and Kathy to come. And so young adults are going to have a time where they can anonymously ask any questions that they want of our senior pastors and myself, about 'why does PBC do church the way that they do?'

I'm really excited for this, because a lot of our young adults are exploring kind of foundational stuff. 'What does it mean to be church and where do I fit into the picture?' It's going to be really exciting time, I think, not just to get to know our senior pastors, but to ask those questions of 'why do we do it in the expression that we do here?', and so I think that's got a lot of potential in it. And so if you're going to be a young adult, if you are a young adult, come and join us. But if you're not, I'd really, really value your prayer over that space, that there'll be really strong foundation of what church is and a heart to be a part of church in all young adults.

The other event is our young adult weekend away, affectionately known as YAWA, and this will be October 11th to 13th. We're going to the CRU Galston Gorge site, and this is kind of what I mentioned in those earlier, gathering nights, kind of like that, but across the whole weekend. So loads of time of people connecting together, a bunch of time worshipping together, and also a bunch of time opening the word and exploring what God has for us in there. So that's a really awesome space as well. If you're a young adult, registrations are going to open near the beginning of August on the website.

But I just want to put YAWA there, knowing that we are a church community that really values having everyone kind of on the same page and, and praying over the leaders in that space, and the young adults in that space. So, yeah, we'll leave it there. Thanks.

Prayer *Speaker: Stephen Bates*

Let me pray. Father, we understand there's a simplicity to all you ask of us; to love you, to love one another, and to make disciples. And so, father, we just want to pray into that, that we would be a people whose heart is set on you. That we would be a people who are generous and kind and loving toward one another. And father, that we would devote our energies to making disciples above all else.

And so, Lord, we thank you. We thank you for this week that has been. We thank you making disciples took such a tangible form in our kids' holiday program. Thank you for the young people, the children who learned the gospel perhaps for the very first time and responded to that We thank you for them, Lord. We thank you for our children who may have been part of the life of our church, and yet their understanding of the gospel and your call upon their lives has been growing through the course of this week.

We thank you for our teenagers who led us this year for the first time, or maybe the second. Lord, we thank you for what they're learning as well about themselves, about who you are. And again, this call upon their lives to make disciples. Father, we pray for the ongoing work of your Spirit in the lives of those who are part of this week.

Father, we pray for life in the spirit as well, that there would be those from within our church who really seek to know more of how you work in our lives and in the life of our church, that they would be just that hunger and that heart to know more about who you are. So, father, we pray that through the life and the spirit, they would be just a greater richness to our spiritual walk.

That they would be a putting aside self-effort and instead have an understanding of just the beautiful power that is given to us through the Holy Spirit, your grace made evident in our lives. Father, we pray also for what Ben has just shared around young adults. We thank you for them. We

thank you for their ministry in the life of this church. Lord, we pray that they would increasingly be disciples who make disciples of others as well.

Lord, we thank you for the simplicity to which you call us, that in a complex world there is a story that is so beautiful, that you are the creator. And despite our failure, you come to us in the person of Jesus Christ. You redeem us to yourself, and you grant us forgiveness, the promise of eternal life and the promise of your Holy Spirit. And we live in accordance with that. Father, help us to do this well and do this for your glory. In Christ's name, amen.

Bible Reading: Nehemiah 3 (NIV UK)

Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate. They dedicated it and set its doors in place, building as far as the Tower of the Hundred, which they dedicated, and as far as the Tower of Hananel. 2 The men of Jericho built the adjoining section, and Zakkur son of Imri built next to them.

3 The Fish Gate was rebuilt by the sons of Hassenaah. They laid its beams and put its doors and bolts and bars in place. 4 Meremoth son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz, repaired the next section. Next to him Meshullam son of Berekiah, the son of Meshezabel, made repairs, and next to him Zadok son of Baana also made repairs. 5 The next section was repaired by the men of Tekoa, but their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work under their supervisors.[a]

6 The Jeshanah[b] Gate was repaired by Joiada son of Paseah and Meshullam son of Besodeiah. They laid its beams and put its doors with their bolts and bars in place. 7 Next to them, repairs were made by men from Gibeon and Mizpah – Melatiah of Gibeon and Jadon of Meronoth – places under the authority of the governor of Trans-Euphrates. 8 Uzziel son of Harhaiah, one of the goldsmiths, repaired the next section; and Hananiah, one of the perfume-makers, made repairs next to that. They restored Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall. 9 Rephaiah son of Hur, ruler of a half-district of Jerusalem, repaired the next section. 10 Adjoining this, Jedaiah son of Harumaph made repairs opposite his house, and Hattush son of Hashabneiah made repairs next to him. 11 Malkijah son of Harim and Hasshub son of Pahath-Moab repaired another section and the Tower of the Ovens. 12 Shallum son of Hallohesh, ruler of a half-district of Jerusalem, repaired the next section with the help of his daughters.

13 The Valley Gate was repaired by Hanun and the residents of Zanoah. They rebuilt it and put its doors with their bolts and bars in place. They also repaired a thousand cubits[c] of the wall as far as the Dung Gate.

14 The Dung Gate was repaired by Malkijah son of Rekab, ruler of the district of Beth Hakkerem. He rebuilt it and put its doors with their bolts and bars in place.

15 The Fountain Gate was repaired by Shallun son of Kol-Hozeh, ruler of the district of Mizpah. He rebuilt it, roofing it over and putting its doors and bolts and bars in place. He also repaired the wall of the Pool of Siloam,[d] by the King's Garden, as far as the steps going down from the City of David. 16 Beyond him, Nehemiah son of Azbuk, ruler of a half-district of Beth Zur, made repairs up to a point opposite the tombs[e] of David, as far as the artificial pool and the House of the Heroes.

17 Next to him, the repairs were made by the Levites under Rehum son of Bani. Beside him, Hashabiah, ruler of half the district of Keilah, carried out repairs for his district. 18 Next to him, the repairs were

made by their fellow Levites under Binnui[ff] son of Henadad, ruler of the other half-district of Keilah. 19 Next to him, Ezer son of Jeshua, ruler of Mizpah, repaired another section, from a point facing the ascent to the armoury as far as the angle of the wall. 20 Next to him, Baruch son of Zabbai zealously repaired another section, from the angle to the entrance of the house of Eliashib the high priest. 21 Next to him, Meremoth son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz, repaired another section, from the entrance of Eliashib's house to the end of it.

22 The repairs next to him were made by the priests from the surrounding region. 23 Beyond them, Benjamin and Hasshub made repairs in front of their house; and next to them, Azariah son of Maaseiah, the son of Ananiah, made repairs beside his house. 24 Next to him, Binnui son of Henadad repaired another section, from Azariah's house to the angle and the corner, 25 and Palal son of Uzai worked opposite the angle and the tower projecting from the upper palace near the court of the guard. Next to him, Pedaiiah son of Parosh 26 and the temple servants living on the hill of Ophel made repairs up to a point opposite the Water Gate towards the east and the projecting tower. 27 Next to them, the men of Tekoa repaired another section, from the great projecting tower to the wall of Ophel.

28 Above the Horse Gate, the priests made repairs, each in front of his own house. 29 Next to them, Zadok son of Immer made repairs opposite his house. Next to him, Shemaiah son of Shekemiah, the guard at the East Gate, made repairs. 30 Next to him, Hananiah son of Shelemiah, and Hanun, the sixth son of Zalaph, repaired another section. Next to them, Meshullam son of Berekiah made repairs opposite his living quarters. 31 Next to him, Malkijah, one of the goldsmiths, made repairs as far as the house of the temple servants and the merchants, opposite the Inspection Gate, and as far as the room above the corner; 32 and between the room above the corner and the Sheep Gate the goldsmiths and merchants made repairs.

Sermon: Building Towards Vision *Speaker: Stephen Bates, Chris*

Stephen: Some of you may not know Chris, but he's going to bring his message. I've known Chris for over ten years now. Chris has been part of Parramatta Baptist Church, it feels like, for many years, because he's been a pastor in three of our local Baptist churches. He's still an accredited Baptist pastor and he used to come here Sunday nights when he could as well.

It may be the first time for some to hear from Chris, too. But yeah, father, I just ask for your blessing upon Chris and his family. I pray for us as we listen to your word. Preach through him that your spirit would be at work in our lives, that we would be responsive and obedient to your word. In Christ's name, amen.

Chris: Thank you, Steve. Well, good morning, it is great to be here. This morning, I want us to look at the book of Nehemiah in Chapter 3, and it's a book that really focuses on the Jewish people rebuilding the walls around Jerusalem. And for me, it's a picture of a great community of people coming together to accomplish an incredible task, and I think that there's some really good challenges in it for us as we seek to be people of God, living out our lives, following Jesus. But before we get into it, let's continue in prayer.

Father God, as we come to your word, we thank you that you are a God that would speak to us. And we pray that as we look at your Word, that we would be attentive to your words and to what your

spirit might be saying within us. Open up our hearts and our minds to engage with you, and may we continue to be transformed as your people into your likeness. In Jesus' name we pray all of this, amen.

Well, before we get into the Bible reading, I want to try and set the scene a little bit for you in the passage that we're going to be looking at today from Nehemiah. You know, if you haven't read the book of Nehemiah, I encourage you to go home and open up the pages and read it for yourself in its entirety.

But in its most basic form, as I've said, it accounts the rebuilding of the walls around Jerusalem, Judah's capital city after they had been destroyed by the Babylonians decades beforehand. You see, after the Babylonians came in and invaded and destroyed everything in sight, the Jewish people that were left there in the city of Jerusalem were then dragged back to Babylon, where they remained in exile for the next 70 years.

You know, you just imagine the people that were alive back then in that invasion, going back to the land of their enemies. And they live the rest of their life there and died. And your children were born. They grew up only ever knowing the stories about their homelands, only ever knowing exile. And then finally, after those 70 years in exile, they are then allowed to be released and allowed to go back to the land of their ancestors.

And so in enters Nehemiah. Whilst many Jews had returned back to Jerusalem, by this stage, Nehemiah had remained in Persia and was working a very respectable job for the king as a cupbearer. And we read that one morning he sees his brother, and he sees some other man from Judah, and he asks them about his people and his homeland, Jerusalem.

And in Nehemiah 1:3, they say this to Nehemiah, *'those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire'*. You know, when Nehemiah hears this, it greatly upsets him, and he sits down and he weeps. And over the next several days, it says that he mourned and fasted and prayed. And then after this moment of sheer boldness and what was clearly God working in a foreign king, the king ends up releasing Nehemiah to go back to Jerusalem to begin the work of rebuilding the walls.

And so off Nehemiah goes, with the support of this foreign king, back to the land of his family and his people, in order to begin this work of rebuilding the walls, including its ten gates. So I encourage you to open up your Bibles as we now continue the story from Nehemiah 2:17.

--- Break as a passage from Nehemiah 2 is read aloud ---

As we get stuck in these passages this morning, I want to ask you a question to think about. Have you ever been involved in something big? I'm not, of course, talking about something that's an

everyday sort of task or occurrence for you. You know, if you're always involved in big, grand scale, amazing, exciting, sorts of things, maybe your life's more exciting than mine is. However, I'm talking about something bigger than the ordinary, you know, whether it be something on a grander scale than you've ever done before, something that takes a large amount of resources or perhaps months or even years of planning, or there's a lot of people involved, or even something that maybe it doesn't look that spectacular on the surface, but its results are significant.

You know, perhaps it was going through the HSC after years and particularly the last few months of intense study, and you've finally gotten the result you want and able to go towards the career that you had in mind. Perhaps there it's an important project at work, or a big sporting or a physical event, maybe being involved in a large construction project, or maybe it's even helping a friend through a difficult time to where they finally saw breakthrough. Or maybe it's even working through some challenges in their own life through to breakthrough. And I'm sure you can think of something big you've been involved in.

Well, one of the big things in my life my wife and I have been involved in was climbing Mount Kinabalu in Malaysia in 2011. You know, that sits there for us as one of those great memories of good accomplishment for us in our lives. Mount Kinabalu is the tallest peak in Southeast Asia. Seeing at 4200, so 4095.2m above sea level. Now for comparison, Mount Kosi also sits at just over 2200m, so this is quite a bit higher. And whilst Mount Kinabalu is dwarfed in comparison with some of the other peaks around the world, it's still quite a challenge for those who set out to accomplish it. And indeed, not everyone makes it to the top.

You know, as we look at the book of Nehemiah, we see this incredibly big task laid out before them. The city of Jerusalem, having been laid siege to by the Babylonians 70 years prior, has its walls still lying in ruins. Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem, and he inspects the work that needs to be done there in the rebuilding.

And then he turns to the people after he's done his own inspections, and he says these words in Nehemiah 2:17. Nehemiah says to them, *"you see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace."* I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me, and what the King had said to me, and they replied, *"let us start rebuilding."* And so they began the good work.'

I don't know if you noticed, but it wasn't really about fixing a wall, although practically that is what they did. You see, Nehemiah showed them the vision of removing disgrace. It was about rebuilding the city. It was a vision of safety, a vision of reestablishing identity, a vision of being reunited as the people of God. Often, we don't take on big challenges or tasks simply for the sake of it. Rather, we buy into some sort of vision at the time, that the effort it's going to take will be worth it.

You know, the vision of climbing Mount Kinabalu wasn't about my wife and I going for a bush walker, and it wasn't really even about us climbing a mountain. You see, the vision was this incredible view that we expected would have whiteness at the summit, being able to look out at God's creation from a perspective we have never seen it before. The vision was about the sense of accomplishment we would feel in pushing ourselves and pushing our bodies farther and harder than we had before. The vision was in being able to rise above what we initially thought would be possible, and discovering more about ourselves in the process. And let me tell you, as we stood on that summit just after sunrise on the next morning, it was a completely worth it. The vision that we pushed so hard towards was worth it.

You know, over the past couple of years here at church, there's been lots of talk about Hub 2.0. We've been talking about replacing the office buildings and the meeting rooms that are down in the back of the car park, those aging demountable buildings. But in other ways. I want to say that it's actually not about replacing aging buildings. You see, what if what if we caught a sense of the vision that this new ministry centre was more about more than just about replacing a building?

What if it's about creating a space for effective ministry to continue now and into the future for generations to come? What if it's about having facilities and spaces that supported our vision of transforming lives for decades to come? What if it opened up more opportunities for worship, for community engagement, for seeing people discover Jesus for the first time, a vision of people receiving support, love and care? it becomes more than about a building, doesn't it?

Just think about even this building we are in now. It's not just a building, it is so much more. It's about the kingdom of God and seeing lives transformed. Likewise, think about each of the ministries within our church, and the various opportunities there are for each of us to serve. You know, we don't just need someone to work on a sound desk so that you can hear the message and hear the songs clearly. We don't need someone just to come and help run a kids' program. We don't just need someone to go on a morning tea roster and so on it goes.

You see, we need people to help create space for others to worship. We need people to help see transformation of kids' lives as they discover the great news about Jesus and what he has done for them. We need people to help create space for community and connection and help us to be the people that God calls us to be.

You see, the Jewish people, they were called to see a vision that the rebuilding of these walls could bring. And you and I are called to do the same. Each of us are called to seek out God's vision and to have assurance that if it is indeed God's vision, then to know that the sovereign God of heaven will give us success, as Nehemiah said in verse 20. The God of heaven will give us success. So what?

The challenge this morning is will we seek out God's vision wherever it might be, wherever we are in life? Will we seek out God's vision?

But can you imagine what it would be like in this world if we all saw the vision? You know, whatever that vision might be, wherever that vision might be, if we all saw it, we all talked about the vision. We celebrated the vision. We helped others see the vision. And that was it. You see, seeing the vision is important and it's powerful. But the vision is only as good as our ability to step out in faith, in service, towards that vision.

As we continue on to Nehemiah 3, what we read about is not only did people see the vision, but they were prepared to step out in faith in service towards that vision. And so from Nehemiah 3:1, it begins by saying these words. It says, *'Elashib the high priest and his fellow priests went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate. They dedicated and set its doors in place, building as far as the Tower of the Hundred, which they dedicated, and as far as the Tower of Hananel. The men of Jericho built the adjoining section, and Zakkur, son of Imri, built next to them.'*

You know, as you continue to read on, person after person, all stepped up and they worked hard towards that vision. They dedicated themselves to it. Some people doing large sections of the walls. We read in verse 13, it says, *'the Valley gate was repaired by Hanun and the residents of Zanoah. They rebuilt it and put its doors with their bolts and bars in place. They also repaired a thousand cubits of the wall as far as the Dung Gate.'*

Now, I don't know how good you are at your ancient conversions of measurements, but those men repaired about 450m of the wall, and they rebuilt the valley gates. A massive effort by that team. But then you get down to verse 28. It says, *'above the Horse Gate, the priests made repairs, each in front of his own house. Next to them, Zadok son Immer made repairs opposite his house,'* and so on it goes.

Some were able to contribute to great amounts towards seeing that vision become a reality, whilst others contributed to a much smaller extent out in front of their own houses. I love that everyone's contribution was considered valuable as they all worked towards that vision, but each person was required to see the vision and then also to step out in faith towards service of that vision.

But as I read through Nehemiah 3, there's something else that really stands out to me. It comes in verse eight again, and it mentions more people that are at work. It says, *'Uzziel, son of Harhaiah, one of the goldsmiths, repaired the next section, and Hananiah, one of the perfume makers, made repairs next to that.'* You know, as we read this verse and all throughout Nehemiah 3, we see a picture of a whole range of people, skilled and unskilled, working to rebuild these walls.

You know, we have a goldsmith, maybe some of his or her skills were transferable to rebuilding walls, particularly strong defensive walls. But a perfume maker? I'm not so sure that that skill is automatically transferable to building strong defensive walls. But we also read of rulers of other regions getting their hands dirty. We hear of priests and just general sorts of people like you and I,

working hard to rebuild these walls. I love the fact there were even people that simply stepped out front of their own houses, and they repaired the section right near their front doors.

You see, they took responsibility for what was there in front of them. They stepped up in faith and they built. It's so easy for each of us to think that we don't have the right skills and abilities. It's so easy for us to think maybe we aren't the right age. 'Maybe I'm too old, or maybe I'm too young.' Or maybe there's something else about us that we feel at about our lives. We feel that maybe, 'I'm not the right person for that' or 'surely I can't do that. I struggle with that.' And I'm sure many of you struggle with that as well.

But, you know, as I read the account of the rebuilding of the walls here, as I read all the pages of scripture, and as I speak to people as they go about their lives in this world, time and time again, I see people stepping up towards vision, stepping out in faith, and they're able to do things that they didn't think that would be possible for them to do. And just imagine if the Jews hadn't stepped up in faith to rebuild those walls.

But what if we don't step up in faith? What good would it have been if my wife and I had this vision of climbing Mount Kinabalu? Perhaps we even booked out transport in our accommodation. We organised our guides, we paid our national park fees, and we stood there at the start of that track. And we didn't take that first step and the step after that and so on. What good would it be for us to have the vision of going and doing the shopping for our neighbours? Because perhaps they're not well and they can't do it for themselves, but then we don't actually go to the shops, we don't ask them whether they need us to pick up something for them.

Or what good would it be for us to have the vision to give our friend a call because they've been going through a really tough time? But then you know what? We never actually get around to picking up that phone call and speaking to them. Or perhaps we have that vision of reading the Bible with our friend who doesn't yet know Christ, but then we never actually get around to asking them because it's just a bit too scary and we're afraid of what they might say.

But what good is this in seeing a vision for this new ministry centre here at PBC, if each of us doesn't make a decision to step out in faith to support it? That's why we so desperately need to be praying about it. And that's why the leadership have set a target to raise a third of the funds before construction is to commence, because each one of us needs to be seen to be able to support this vision, to want to take those steps of faith so that it become a reality for now, but also for generations to come. Again, it's not for the sake of a new building, but rather it's for a vision that is so much greater than a building can provide in itself. A vision of continued transformation, of people's lives into the future as we continue to seek to faithfully follow God's guiding.

And so the question we are all called to consider is when we see vision, when we see God's vision that he gives to us, whatever it may be and wherever we may be in life, will we be committed to the

vision? Are we prepared to take those steps of faith, despite whether we feel that we are called or gifted or not? And will we serve in order to see that vision become a reality? I think it's a really tough challenge for us all to seek to take those steps of faith towards the vision that God has given us.

Well, I'm sure many of you have heard the saying, 'many hands make light work.' You know, the whole point of that saying is to say that whenever there's a big task to be done, it's so much easier when you are doing it with other people who can be there to help you. I remember when I was studying computer science at uni about 23 years ago or so, and one of our subjects involved us working in groups on a specific project for a business. As a team, we needed to meet with the leaders of that business. We had to talk about what challenges they had, and we needed to write some software in order to meet that challenge for them.

And, well, with that project, we could all take on various parts of that project according to our gifts and abilities and our interests. But there was a requirement there that meant each of us had to actually be involved in writing the code for that software, and unfortunately, it didn't all go to plan as a lot of group projects don't.

So we worked really well initially as a team, but there became some issues later on where our lead programmer seemed to drop off the face of the earth. You know, we tried calling him numerous times. We emailed him, we sent him numerous messages, and we got zero response whatsoever. And time started to get away, to a run away from us, and we had no idea where he was even working on it.

And so we started to panic, get a bit of anxiety as you can imagine. Well, to cut a long story short, we finally were able to organize a meeting as a whole team, this other person included, and our two lecturers and our lecturers asked him a question, and his response to that question has stuck with me all these years later, one of our lecturers asked him a very simple question, just said, "so what's going on?"

And do you know what his response was? "I just wanted to work on it myself. I just wanted to work on it myself." You see, whilst he was a talented programmer, he had missed the whole point of the assignment, that it was all about teamwork. It was all about understanding that we all had skills and abilities that could contribute to this project. And if we all did it together, then it made the task so much easier and it would be something that we all together could own for ourselves.

Can you imagine what it would have been like if Nehemiah had turned up to Jerusalem? He looked at the work when it was needing to be done, and for whatever reason, he decided just to do it all himself, to rebuild the entirety of the wall. That's ten gates, all by himself. He needed a team around him to help carry the load of such a big task, but he also needed the team around him so they could support one another, so that they could encourage one another, so they could help each other continue to see the vision that they are working so hard towards.

Can you just imagine the scene there in Jerusalem, as they're all building the walls and the gates? You know, one man is there with his family, with his sons and daughters working away on the wall just outside their house, and then they turn to the right and they see their neighbours there, all the family out there working on the wall in front of their house and then further down the family after that. And as they turn to their left and they see the same thing, everybody, they're working together. And then they see rulers of regions, they're working, and they see goldsmiths and perfume makers, everybody contributing, all working as equals, contributing where they can, and committed to the one task and the one vision as one community.

You know, I love there's so many people here at PBC that that serve God in this church. We are truly blessed to have so many people serving, using their gifts and abilities. You know, whether you serve on the worship team, on the sound desk, or in the morning tea to your supper rosters, whether you help with cleaning or maintenance or you help with the park ministry or our various prayer teams, or even now our various kids programs, and again, a huge thank you to everybody who served for the program in the past week with the Kids Holiday program. My kids absolutely loved it. It was just such a joy to see all the kids having such a great time.

But wherever you serve, we are so blessed to have you generously serving with your time and your energy. But it takes teamwork, does it not? You say one person can't do it all. Stephen or Kathy can't do it all. It takes a community. And if we are to step forward in the faith of the vision of the new ministry centre, then likewise, I want to say that it needs a community behind us. It doesn't matter how much the leaders believe in the vision, if we as a community aren't behind it, taking steps of faith together, taking steps of praying for us, of sacrificially giving in and serving where we can, if we're not prepared to do that, then I want to say that that vision won't easily succeed.

You say community is important. We need each other. Well, I want to finish off, but there's one more thing I just want draw our minds to quickly. I don't know about you, but for me, whenever I set out on a big task, it can be really hard to remain persistent at times, as the Jews were. They're working hard on rebuilding the walls and helping to rebuild their community. The difficulty of that task would have been challenging enough to help them to stay focused.

But there's also this real and significant fear from the surrounding nations. So in Nehemiah 2 & 4 in particular, they're filled with these threats and these warnings from the surrounding nations, those who had no desire for the city of Jerusalem to be reestablished, and for the people to be reunited as the people of God as a God worshipping community. Those enemies were right there in the distance, getting angry and waiting for their chance to destroy them once and for all.

Let's read Nehemiah 4: 1-3. *"When Sanballat heard that they were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews, and in the presence of the associates and the army of Samaria, he said, "what are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices?"*

Will they finish it in a day? Can they bring their stones back to life from those heaps of rubble, burned as they are?" Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, "what they are building, even a fox climbing up it would break down their walls of stones!"

There's a real fear here that if they continued their hard work and rebuilding these walls, if they continued their hard work on continuing towards this vision that they'd been given of transformation and restoration, the real fear is that their enemies might come upon them and destroy them once and for all. And so they pray. And in Nehemiah 4:9, he says, *"but we prayed to our God, and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat."*

Fear and persecution never prevented them from doing the work that they felt they were called to do for them. The real threat of this from the surrounding nations was great, but it wasn't big enough to cause them to abandon the vision and abandon each other, no matter how easy that could have been, to just stop and to walk away.

And then we come to Nehemiah 4:6, which often is such an encouraging verse, and it says this. *"So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked for it with all of their heart."* And this is why I love this passage so much. Because at the end of the day, they remained focused on the vision. They remained focused that it was about a community, passionate dedication to these visions that they've been given by God.

And together they took steps of faith forward for the transformation of their lives and for their community. And isn't this what the vision for our church here is? It's been hung on the wall over there, it's been spoken about in our services. The vision of our church is that we want to be a community of people led by God's Spirit, each joining with Jesus to see lives transformed. Every time we come together as a community, every time we serve together, we pray together, we sacrificially give, we seek to see lives transformed through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Every time we do those things, and so much more, we are seeking to be the people that God calls us to be, to be the community that God calls us to be.

And it's so encouraging seeing and hearing continued stories of transformation through people here at PBC and in our communities. What do I say? I look forward to hearing more and more stories of transformation as we step forward into the future, seeking to go towards the vision that God calls for us. So this morning, will we keep stepping forward in faith towards those visions? Will we keep seeking out God and be the community that God calls us to be, because God will give us success? Let us pray.

Post-Sermon Prayer *Speaker: Chris*

Father God, we thank you so much that you're a God who is with us. You're a God who speaks to us. You're a God who continues to call us to you, to himself.

Father, we ask that you will keep giving us your vision. And father, give us boldness to be able to take those steps of faith towards that vision, not for our name's sake, but for your name's sake. Because we know, father, you are in the mission of transforming people's lives for all eternity. And it is so encouraging God that you will call us to be on that mission with you.

So, father, help us to be obedient to that. Help us to see the transformative work that you are bringing about through your people here, father God, and help us to know that together we are your community. We are your people. Thank you for your love and for being with us. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Affirming Words *Speaker: Worship Team*

Thank you, Chris. What an encouragement this morning to step out in faith. I just want to give a really quick example of somebody who stepped out in faith this week. I met Julie* on Tuesday at the in the cafe during the kids' program, and I'd just had a singer pull out and I said to her, "oh, hi, I'm in it. You don't sing, do you?" And she said, "well, I can." And she stepped up. Look, what a great example of someone who's willing to take courage and just and step out, because it's not easy doing what we do. I don't find this particularly easy. This is the struggle for me personally. So, you know, encountering and facing fear, I think is part of the journey of stepping in faith.

If you're not ever feeling, if you don't show up, "God, I'm stuffed", if you never feeling that, then you're probably not stepping out in faith is my impression. So, let's stand.

Worship Singing

Song: Yet Not I But Through Christ In Me by Jonny Robinson, Michael Farren, Rich Thompson

Post-Worship Prayer *Speaker: Stephen Bates*

So, father, we thank you that you have always been the one who takes the initiative. You are the one who always starts things. You speak us into existence. You are the one who leads, who guides, but father in all that you call us to follow. And you call us to obey and to step out in faith.

Lord, it's your power, your strength, your leading. But Lord, our obedience matters. And so as we go into this week, father, we want to commit ourselves to walking with you, of hearing from you and responding in faith in trusting you for our future. And Lord, again, just for the simplicity, just enable us by your spirit to truly worship you, to love you, to love one another, but also take hold of this call upon our lives to make disciples. And may this be to your glory, amen.

Conclusion *Speaker: Stephen Bates*

Thank you so much for joining us. Please stay and join us for morning tea, and as always, there are people who are down the front here who would love to pray for you. Whatever your needs or your desire is, they would love to pray to that for you. They'll just be down the front here, wearing lanyards. So, please feel free to come and receive prayer. God bless you all. We'll see you next week.

Online Outro *Speaker: Kathy Bates*

Hey, thank you for joining us online today. We pray that you have been blessed and encouraged. And if there is something from today that you would like us to pray into with you, don't hesitate to let us know.

If we haven't met you, we'd love to hear from you. And you also welcome to come and join us in person as well. To know more about our church, please go to our church website and you can also find more details about who we are through our newsletter. And you can subscribe to that through our website as well.

God bless you and may you have a great week.

**Names have been changed to protect privacy.*