# Sermon Script: Nehemiah 2-3 ‘Action’

Recap of slides from last week

Discuss: What did you think about all that?

[Lying on couch:]

I’ve just been reading about ...

... an amazing new family orientated theme park that’s been built in Henderson

* It’s called ‘Woah Studios’ - that’s W.o.a.h.
  + It’s got amazing outdoor themed play areas
  + It has a theatre with a very funny live show
  + It has a full service restaurant run by a judge from My Kitchen Rules
  + It has a giant gold statue of a super villain called Dr Gloom

Sounds absolutely brilliant...

... and the Herald article on it says loads of people are going and everybody’s loving it

How did all of that come about?

* It started because a guy who worked in an IT company started day dreaming
  + He had no experience of puppets or playgrounds or restaurants or supervillians
    - Just one guy with an idea

He took a gigantic risk

* He sold his IT company for this day dream
* He said back in those days he couldn’t really even explain to people what he was trying to do
  + He worked 17 hour days
  + He said it was harrowing and draining with no promise of success and no blueprint to work to
  + It almost spiralled out of control at one point
* Yet today, hundreds of kids are loving it and there are plans to make it bigger

Amazing to see how he turned an idea, a dream...

... into action

* It’s amazing how much he risked
  + It’s amazing how much he sacrificed for it

I love stories like this

* And I love ideas and dreams
  + They excite us; fill us with possibility

The couch is a great place for ideas; for dreaming

* It’s not a great place for putting ideas into action
* For some people that doesn’t matter
  + Let’s just stay in the world of ideas
  + Stay on the couch
  + Ideas are fun
    - Working out those ideas - well that involves risk and sacrifice
      * *Ah forget it we think ... let’s move on to a new idea*

Sometimes we can even spiritualise it as Christians

* *‘If it’s meant to happen, God will make it happen’*
  + And we stay on the couch

* Well you know, to be frank, I’d happily stay here on the couch for my whole sermon today!
  + it’s comfy
* We could become a church of ideas, without the need for action

And so it is with a great effort of the will

... that I extract myself

... and reach for a Bible

... for another story about a guy with a dream

... who faced a similar challenge to put that dream into action

* As you’ll see, he’s not a guy who stayed on the couch

Nehemiah chapters 2 & 3

* Grab a Bible from your pew
* Remember that Nehemiah is in Exile; he is the King’s cupbearer
  + And in chapter 1 he prays that God will make the King favourable to his request

2 Early the following spring, in the month of Nisan, during the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes’ reign, I was serving the king his wine. I had never before appeared sad in his presence. 2 So the king asked me, “Why are you looking so sad? You don’t look sick to me. You must be deeply troubled.”

Then I was terrified, 3 but I replied, “Long live the king! How can I not be sad? For the city where my ancestors are buried is in ruins, and the gates have been destroyed by fire.”

4 The king asked, “Well, how can I help you?”

With a prayer to the God of heaven, 5 I replied, “If it please the king, and if you are pleased with me, your servant, send me to Judah to rebuild the city where my ancestors are buried.”

6 The king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked, “How long will you be gone? When will you return?” After I told him how long I would be gone, the king agreed to my request.

7 I also said to the king, “If it please the king, let me have letters addressed to the governors of the province west of the Euphrates River, instructing them to let me travel safely through their territories on my way to Judah. 8 And please give me a letter addressed to Asaph, the manager of the king’s forest, instructing him to give me timber. I will need it to make beams for the gates of the Temple fortress, for the city walls, and for a house for myself.” And the king granted these requests, because the gracious hand of God was on me.

9 When I came to the governors of the province west of the Euphrates River, I delivered the king’s letters to them. The king, I should add, had sent along army officers and horsemen to protect me. 10 But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard of my arrival, they were very displeased that someone had come to help the people of Israel.

[It’s worth remembering those names in the book of Nehemiah - Sanballat and Tobiah]

**Nehemiah Inspects Jerusalem’s Wall**

11 So I arrived in Jerusalem.

Three days later, 12 I slipped out during the night, taking only a few others with me. I had not told anyone about the plans God had put in my heart for Jerusalem. We took no pack animals with us except the donkey I was riding. 13 After dark I went out through the Valley Gate, past the Jackal’s Well, and over to the Dung Gate to inspect the broken walls and burned gates. 14 Then I went to the Fountain Gate and to the King’s Pool, but my donkey couldn’t get through the rubble. 15 So, though it was still dark, I went up the Kidron Valley instead, inspecting the wall before I turned back and entered again at the Valley Gate.

16 The city officials did not know I had been out there or what I was doing, for I had not yet said anything to anyone about my plans. I had not yet spoken to the Jewish leaders—the priests, the nobles, the officials, or anyone else in the administration. 17 But now I said to them, “You know very well what trouble we are in. Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire. Let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and end this disgrace!” 18 Then I told them about how the gracious hand of God had been on me, and about my conversation with the king.

They replied at once, “Yes, let’s rebuild the wall!” So they began the good work.

19 But when Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem the Arab heard of our plan, they scoffed contemptuously. “What are you doing? Are you rebelling against the king?” they asked.

[Our friends again - Sanballat and Tobiah, and a third added - Geshem the Arab]

20 I replied, “The God of heaven will help us succeed. We, his servants, will start rebuilding this wall. But you have no share, legal right, or historic claim in Jerusalem.”

And now just take a look at chapter three

* The entire chapter is a roll call of people who sacrificed something to make this vision come about
* All these different people playing different parts in this massive rebuild
  + These guys rebuilt this gate here
  + Those ones cleared that rubble
  + These ones rebuilt that tower etc
  + It’s a wonderful picture of unity and working together

Nehemiah’s vision has a huge element of risk

* As you’ll find out soon, their lives will be endangered because of it
* And all the hours they spend rebuilding Jerusalem are hours they aren’t earning a living for their families
* So there’s huge sacrifice
* I suspect there were a few 17 hour days put in along the way

And people came from miles away to get stuck in and show their solidarity...

... but not everyone

* Verse 5 is fascinating.
  + *It says: ‘Next came the people from Tekoa, though their leaders refused to work with their construction supervisors.’*
* So the people from Tekoa got stuck in, but their leaders left them to it!
  + ‘We’re above this sort of thing’, maybe?
  + Maybe they weren’t prepared to risk themselves or sacrifice anything

**Chapter 3: Rebuilding the Wall of Jerusalem**

3 Then Eliashib the high priest and the other priests started to rebuild at the Sheep Gate. They dedicated it and set up its doors, building the wall as far as the Tower of the Hundred, which they dedicated, and the Tower of Hananel. 2 People from the town of Jericho worked next to them, and beyond them was Zaccur son of Imri.

3 The Fish Gate was built by the sons of Hassenaah. They laid the beams, set up its doors, and installed its bolts and bars. 4 Meremoth son of Uriah and grandson of Hakkoz repaired the next section of wall. Beside him were Meshullam son of Berekiah and grandson of Meshezabel, and then Zadok son of Baana. 5 Next were the people from Tekoa, though their leaders refused to work with the construction supervisors.

6 The Old City Gate[a] was repaired by Joiada son of Paseah and Meshullam son of Besodeiah. They laid the beams, set up its doors, and installed its bolts and bars. 7 Next to them were Melatiah from Gibeon, Jadon from Meronoth, people from Gibeon, and people from Mizpah, the headquarters of the governor of the province west of the Euphrates River.[b] 8 Next was Uzziel son of Harhaiah, a goldsmith by trade, who also worked on the wall. Beyond him was Hananiah, a manufacturer of perfumes. They left out a section of Jerusalem as they built the Broad Wall.[c]

9 Rephaiah son of Hur, the leader of half the district of Jerusalem, was next to them on the wall. 10 Next Jedaiah son of Harumaph repaired the wall across from his own house, and next to him was Hattush son of Hashabneiah. 11 Then came Malkijah son of Harim and Hasshub son of Pahath-moab, who repaired another section of the wall and the Tower of the Ovens. 12 Shallum son of Hallohesh and his daughters repaired the next section. He was the leader of the other half of the district of Jerusalem.

13 The Valley Gate was repaired by the people from Zanoah, led by Hanun. They set up its doors and installed its bolts and bars. They also repaired the 1,500 feet[d] of wall to the Dung Gate.

14 The Dung Gate was repaired by Malkijah son of Recab, the leader of the Beth-hakkerem district. He rebuilt it, set up its doors, and installed its bolts and bars.

15 The Fountain Gate was repaired by Shallum[e] son of Col-hozeh, the leader of the Mizpah district. He rebuilt it, roofed it, set up its doors, and installed its bolts and bars. Then he repaired the wall of the pool of Siloam[f] near the king’s garden, and he rebuilt the wall as far as the stairs that descend from the City of David. 16 Next to him was Nehemiah son of Azbuk, the leader of half the district of Beth-zur. He rebuilt the wall from a place across from the tombs of David’s family as far as the water reservoir and the House of the Warriors.

17 Next to him, repairs were made by a group of Levites working under the supervision of Rehum son of Bani. Then came Hashabiah, the leader of half the district of Keilah, who supervised the building of the wall on behalf of his own district. 18 Next down the line were his countrymen led by Binnui[g] son of Henadad, the leader of the other half of the district of Keilah.

19 Next to them, Ezer son of Jeshua, the leader of Mizpah, repaired another section of wall across from the ascent to the armory near the angle in the wall. 20 Next to him was Baruch son of Zabbai, who zealously repaired an additional section from the angle to the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest. 21 Meremoth son of Uriah and grandson of Hakkoz rebuilt another section of the wall extending from the door of Eliashib’s house to the end of the house.

22 The next repairs were made by the priests from the surrounding region. 23 After them, Benjamin and Hasshub repaired the section across from their house, and Azariah son of Maaseiah and grandson of Ananiah repaired the section across from his house. 24 Next was Binnui son of Henadad, who rebuilt another section of the wall from Azariah’s house to the angle and the corner. 25 Palal son of Uzai carried on the work from a point opposite the angle and the tower that projects up from the king’s upper house beside the court of the guard. Next to him were Pedaiah son of Parosh, 26 with the Temple servants living on the hill of Ophel, who repaired the wall as far as a point across from the Water Gate to the east and the projecting tower. 27 Then came the people of Tekoa, who repaired another section across from the great projecting tower and over to the wall of Ophel.

28 Above the Horse Gate, the priests repaired the wall. Each one repaired the section immediately across from his own house. 29 Next Zadok son of Immer also rebuilt the wall across from his own house, and beyond him was Shemaiah son of Shecaniah, the gatekeeper of the East Gate. 30 Next Hananiah son of Shelemiah and Hanun, the sixth son of Zalaph, repaired another section, while Meshullam son of Berekiah rebuilt the wall across from where he lived. 31 Malkijah, one of the goldsmiths, repaired the wall as far as the housing for the Temple servants and merchants, across from the Inspection Gate. Then he continued as far as the upper room at the corner. 32 The other goldsmiths and merchants repaired the wall from that corner to the Sheep Gate.



Now how does a complete outsider, like Nehemiah...

... without any rank

... randomly show up in town

... with a crazy idea that has proven impossible before

... that will endanger people’s lives

... and require them to sacrifice all their disposable hours

* And suddenly the whole town is on board and doing it!

There are some amazing things we can learn from Nehemiah...

... about putting a dream into action

* Principles from this chapter apply to just about any thing you really hope to see one day
  + Whether your hopes and dreams are personal ones or for your workplace or whatever
  + Nehemiah 2 & 3 are incredible model for making a dream into reality

**1. Firstly, take a close up look at your situation**

* Nehemiah had heard about Jerusalem’s destruction

... but he needed to get out and see it for himself

... as in verses 11 - 16 where he heads out with his donkey in the middle of the night

Hearsay or guesswork is not good enough

* Get out there and find out properly for yourself
  + Then you have some authority to speak from
* This is about getting off the couch

I wonder how many times in churches

... there were good ideas that didn’t get off the ground because it was all talk, and no one did any investigation about viability

And we talked last week about how secular people see us

* Why don’t we go ask them?
* Is that getting off the couch?
  + *Finding out for ourselves*
* We think we know how community people see us, but do we really?
  + What if you were to do some investigation?
  + Take a close up look for yourself, like Nehemiah did?
    - Does that sound too hard? Too scary?

**2. Secondly, share your idea/vision with leadership first**

* This is not a rule; it’s just logic
* If you want to engage the people, engage influencers and leaders first

... because they’ll be best placed to help you engage everyone

* That’s why after his midnight escapade to check out the situation, the first thing Nehemiah does in verses 16 - 18 is meet with the priests, the nobles, the officials and those in administration
* His secretiveness is because he wanted those people to know first

And the way he gets them on board is clever

* He starts by identifying with them, saying:

*... ‘You see the trouble we are in’*

* Then he appeals to their spiritual values by saying, the state of Jerusalem’s walls is a disgrace
  + In other words: God’s special city should not look like this
  + And shows how God led him to this
* Then he invites immediate action

And it’s important to see that...

... Nehemiah has no power to force these leaders to do anything

* He presents his case well, having done his research,

... and because they are convinced they all get on board

On 16th March if you have a look on Pulse

... we have a Leaders’ Cafe

* We’ve got a bit of an idea
  + We’d love to hear what you all think

But for all of this important leadership stuff

* I think my third point is the one that matters most

1. **Be absolutely clear on what is driving you** (v4b, 8b, 12b, 18a, 20a; Ch 3:1b)

This is what we often don’t do

* “I’ve got this great idea...

... we should all do XYZ thing”

* But why?
  + *Who is it really for?*
  + *Who will benefit from it?*
* The idea can drive us and have us doing 17 hour days
  + But what is it that is driving us to do that thing?

And this is where you could miss the point of these chapters entirely

... by turning it into leadership 101

... or three simple steps to greatness

... or a blueprint for making all your materialistic dreams come true

* The whole point of everything Nehemiah did is found in these crucial little turns of phrase:



* It was all about God
* Nehemiah risked everything, sacrificed everything - for God
  + What drove him? God did
  + Who would benefit from it? The Kingdom of God
* And it’s not because Nehemiah was some career missionary or ambitious pastor and needed it on his CV
* He was a lay person like you
  + But his great dream was to raise up God’s Kingdom

So when I read articles about that amazing...

... theme park in Henderson

* With all the same risk and sacrifice and commitment, I think brilliant! So much to admire
* But Woah Studios isn’t going to bring revival
* If we long for our country to know God like the author of our national anthem did, it’s not the theme park kind of vision that will bring it about

And while I love the colour that theme parks bring to the world

... and I’d love to take my girls to all of them

* I wonder if there are people today like Nehemiah
  + Who let themselves be driven by God dreams
  + That change the way society sees the people of God
  + And in time changes society itself
    - Are there any Nehemiahs today?
    - With dreams to give other people hope?
      * Dreams for outreach?
      * Dreams to help others find God in the maze and confusion of life?
      * And willing to fast and pray desperately - like in chapter 1 - realizing the need is so great

It’s not that other kinds of dreams aren’t valuable

* But the dreams God puts on your heart have eternal value

Let me close with one small example

* Someone brought this idea to me
* What if we could create a book about incredible encounters with God from people in our church
  + One church has already done this
  + St Paul’s in the CBD

What’s powerful about this book...

... is that it’s not written by pastors

* Like Nehemiah, it’s regular people with amazing stories about God
  + And it’s presented so well as a book that it would sit well on anyone’s coffee table
  + And it’s not testimonies so much as stories about real struggles with life and how God made a difference

It’s an amazing witness to God

* And a great conversation starter with non church folk
* I think it’s worth seeing if we could do this

So we thought why not test the waters a little...

... to see if you all think it’s a good idea

* We’ve got a service on 26 March called The Place of Stories
  + - What if we could find ten such stories that we could have ready for that Sunday?
    - It would make for an amazing Sunday to hear them,

... and I reckon if we could find the first ten we’d know whether or not we could make a book like this

* What do you think?

PRAYER