

Sermon Series: “Hand Me Another Brick”—Lord of Life Lutheran, Westfield, IN—5/29/2005

Title: “Before we build—making sure our house is in order”

Text: Nehemiah 10: 28-39

Intro: *Ills.: Two most difficult things to do*

Theme: We refocus not on the prospects of the construction of a new building but on the building of the house of the Lord in our own lives by first of all making sure that our spiritual house is in order through God’s power within us.

Spiritually thought-out priorities in our lives

- What are some of the fundamental priorities of your current life?
 1. Family, children, good grade, high SAT scores, college education, finding a spouse, good health, job/career success, our building, children’s religious training or programs, strong faith God
 2. What happens when disaster, debilitating illness, death, unforeseen circumstances touch your priorities
 - a. *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Mat 6: 19-21*
 3. Prioritizing your life to stand the test of time (**chap. 10: 28-29**)
 - a. Some would say— **God–1st , family–2nd , job– 3rd — last** God says— **God – 1st , God – 2nd , God – last**
 - b. *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Mat 6: 33*
- We can only correctly prioritize when we confront the reality of our life
 1. Context is chapter 9 when the people heard the Law of Moses which confronted theirs and fallen ancestors’ history
 - a. *...Now because of all of this, we are making an agreement in writing...taking on themselves a curse and oath.9:28; 10:29*
 2. When we understand the bottom line is sin/Savior; forgiveness/condemnation; hope/despair; heaven/hell
 - a. *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you, 1 Peter 1: 3-4*

Connecting priorities not just to commitments but to Christ-driven principles

- Set Christian commitments for the home based upon biblically based rationale (**vs. 30**)
 1. Reserving marriage for fellow Jews was more than prejudicial nationalism
 - a. God had commanded it in Deut 7:3 because of the heathen and sadistic practices of nations around
 2. God also commands believers to put the same kind of care in selection of spouses to pass faith to next generation
 - a. *Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? 2 Cor. 6:14*
 - b. **Ills.: The danger of unequal yoking**
- Set your Christian standards in which you raise your world/not lower yourself (**vs. 31**)
 1. Nehemiah’s people understood that faith integrity started from the small things and built from there
 - a. Why Sabbath’s rest and set apart nature important? It said much about who they were as people of God
 2. What are the small areas of moral and ethical and spiritual integrity that we need to get back to?
 - a. Cheating on time at work; pushing the traffic laws; taking advantage of others; financial carelessness, etc.
 3. **Aspire Higher**– *Live as children of light for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth. Eph.5: 9*
- Make your Christianity more than just your religion but rather an expression of your faith (**vs. 32-39**)

1. **Refusing a Christian practice of obligation and ritual (vs. 32-33)**
 - a. As with the O.T. people much of today's Christianity has become a lifeless religious club for many
 - b. God despises that kind of worship/faith (*This people draw near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me, and their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote.* Is29:13)
2. **Giving God our unconditional service** because Jesus came "*not to be served but to serve*" (Mark 10:45)
 - a. **Ills.: Leadership by example**
 - b. Nehemiah's people knew glorious task of offering sacrifices took hard work of cutting wood--yet took turns (34)
 - c. Ministry to each other is often onerous and dirty business — but "*but we love because he first loved us.*" 1 J4:19
3. **Giving God your best because God gave his best (vs. 35-38---first fruit, first-born)**
 - a. Tithe in the O.T. was not so much about what they gave but about what God gave (figuring from the whole)
 - b. What has God given you and how does that make you respond? (*list it out on your bulletin*)
4. **Regularly celebrating/worshipping our God and Savior** who has redeemed you from this life and this world
 - a. "*We will not neglect the house of our God.*" vs. 39

Two most difficult things to do

In an interview many years ago, the very successful industrialist Henry Ford was asked what, in all his dealings with people was the most difficult thing to get them to do. After a brief reflection he answered that he would name two things, in the order of their importance. The first and most difficult was getting people to think before they act. The second was maintaining proper priorities, doing things in the order of their importance. Susan Schaeffer Macaulay in *How to Be Your Own Selfish Pig* (Elgin, Ill. David C. Cook Publishing Co., Chariot Books, 1982), p. 15.

The Danger of unequal yoking

Time magazine reported (1/22/95) that the earthquake in Kobe, Japan, occurred when two plates on a fault line fifteen miles offshore suddenly shifted against each other, violently lurching six to ten feet in opposite directions. The result was the worst Japanese earthquake since 1923. Thousands died. More than 46,000 buildings lay in ruins. One-fifth of the city's population was left instantly homeless. The destruction unleashed by those two tectonic plates depicts what happens when a Christian bonds unequally with a non-Christian. Two people committed to each other but going in different directions can only lead to trouble. **Citation: David Farnum, Rochester, New York. Leadership, Vol. 16, no. 3.**

Leadership By Example

The book *Firehouse*, by David Halberstam, tells of Manhattan's Firehouse 40/35, from which 13 men responded on September 11th and only one returned. One who did not return was Captain Frank Callahan. Halberstam describes effective leadership by exploring Captain Callahan's wielding of authority. Halberstam writes: A few years [before Callahan arrived] an officer had come into the house determined to make his mark by letting the men know who was in charge. He was a strutter; one of these officers, the men said, who swaggered when sitting down. He operated from the start as a hard nose, always showing everyone how tough he was and how they had better shape up to meet his high standards. What was worse was that they did not like what they saw of him as a fireman. Words in a firehouse matter much less than deeds. That captain did not last—he did not pass the firehouse leadership test. The captain's character is elemental to the code of the firehouse, for he holds in his hands the men's very survival, regularly making decisions of life and death. By tradition the captain is the first in and the last out of any fire. The officers lead the men into the fire and share their dangers. Thus leadership and title are not merely hierarchical with firemen; they are the basis of a sacred trust. Week by week, month by month, [Captain Callahan] won their trust. His leadership was all by

example. *Citation: Adapted from David Halberstam, Firehouse (Hyperion, 2002), pp. 31-34; submitted by Harry Heintz*

Neh. 10:28-39

²⁸"The rest of the people--priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers, temple servants and all who separated themselves from the neighboring peoples for the sake of the Law of God, together with their wives and all their sons and daughters who are able to understand--²⁹ all these now join their brothers the nobles, and bind themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the Lord our Lord.

³⁰"We promise not to give our daughters in marriage to the peoples around us or take their daughters for our sons.

³¹"When the neighboring peoples bring merchandise or grain to sell on the Sabbath, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on any holy day. Every seventh year we will forgo working the land and will cancel all debts.

³²"We assume the responsibility for carrying out the commands to give a third of a shekel each year for the service of the house of our God: ³³for the bread set out on the table; for the regular grain offerings and burnt offerings; for the offerings on the Sabbaths, New Moon festivals and appointed feasts; for the holy offerings; for sin offerings to make atonement for Israel; and for all the duties of the house of our God. ³⁴"We--the priests, the Levites and the people-- have cast lots to determine when each of our families is to bring to the house of our God at set times each year a contribution of wood to burn on the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the Law. ³⁵ "We also assume responsibility for bringing to the house of the LORD each year the first fruits of our crops and of every fruit tree. ³⁶"As it is also written in the Law, we will bring the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, of our herds and of our flocks to the house of our God, to the priests ministering there. ³⁷"Moreover, we will bring to the storerooms of the house of our God, to the priests, the first of our ground meal, of our grain offerings, of the fruit of all our trees and of our new wine and oil. And we will bring a tithe of our crops to the Levites, for it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all the towns where we work. ³⁸A priest descended from Aaron is to accompany the Levites when they receive the tithes, and the Levites are to bring a tenth of the tithes up to the house of our God, to the storerooms of the treasury.

³⁹The people of Israel, including the Levites, are to bring their contributions of grain, new wine and oil to the storerooms where the articles for the sanctuary are kept and where the ministering priests, the gatekeepers and the singers stay. "We will not neglect the house of our God."