

A Time to Build

Valleys Family Church Sermon
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 24th Feb 2013

Intro-

- Going to have an offering today for the building work. Reminds us of a certain time in Israel's history when they returned from captivity in Babylon and came back to Jerusalem. The city was in ruins and also the walls around the city. It all had to be rebuilt, would cost a fortune and would need a tremendous amount of work- what were they to do?

3 groups- (hammering, sawing, 'lovely') each time something is built. 2 kings (Cyrus, Artaxerxes) A chair for the king. A robe, a crown. Nehemiah (costume and cup). A group of returnees to act out walking and rebuilding walls- one has a sword and a trowel.

Read first 6 lines from 'A Time to Build' (from Lion Storyteller Bible)

RESPOND to God-Opportunities

- God Gave His People an OPPORTUNITY. *Context:* 70 years captivity in Babylonia. Then Persians defeated Babylonians and it seemed all their prayers were answered- Cyrus said they could go home. Initially 2 waves of people returned- first with Zerubbabel (and they rebuilt the temple), later with Ezra. A third wave would come back with Nehemiah, but that is later in today's story.
- However, not everyone decided to return, many had become comfortable in Babylon, they had their own businesses and had mixed with the culture and many perhaps did not see the point of returning to Jerusalem.
- However, this was a God-given opportunity and it would not last forever, it was a window of opportunity that only a few chose to take. We must not miss our God-given opportunity- God has given us a chance to make a huge difference in our generation and to influence generations to come- let's not miss it as many Israelites missed this opportunity to return to Jerusalem. Jerusalem and Israel was the land of their inheritance- God's gift to them, we should not despise it or neglect it when God graciously gives us gifts and opportunities.
- A building does not replace our vision, it helps us fulfil it. It is a tool, not to become an idol or a distraction from vision but an aid to fulfilling it.
- Our vision as Brynmawr Family Church is on the front and back of each newsheet. It is to Build Followers of Christ in response to the great commission from our king in Matt 28:18-20. Our plan is to establish a strong, healthy local Church here in Brynmawr from which we can plant out from into other areas. A good building is very useful to fulfill this vision. A building provides us with a base to build a strong Church, which we can plant out from in a similar way to the Church in Antioch. We must continue to have small groups- homegroups, but larger gatherings are essential for focus, direction, unity and motivation.
- Our vision is further fulfilled by our focus on 8 key areas. These are Discipleship, Evangelism, Fellowship, Prayer, Presence, Ministry, Mercy and Worship.
Discipleship- A building is a base where many can be disciplined and trained in the Word, where local and outside speakers can come in and teach greater numbers of people. Seminars can be done in breakout groups in different rooms. We become able to host events not previously possible. **Evangelism-** A great sending place- meeting for briefing and prayer before going out on the streets- Passion Play, Street

Pastors etc. Guest services with invited in Evangelists, outreach evening, meals etc. A great venue which can be tailored and decorated for outreach events to youth, children, luncheon clubs for older folk. **Fellowship**- a building helps us when we choose to combine homegroups for socials, when we do meals where we invite friends along, quiz nights, dance evenings etc. **Prayer**- nights of prayer, 24-7 prayer can be done effectively with a building. Weekly intercession can take place there, rooms can be allocated for prayer before the meetings, without having valuable time robbed due to setting up vast equipment. **Presence**- A focal point where people can come together to seek the face of God, where extended ministry can happen uninterrupted. A place where, if God comes in power there is not someone waiting to close up. **Ministry**- a place where people can be trained in gifts and released to serve the body of Christ more effectively. Opportunities for areas of service are increased with a building. Possibilities for new ministries thrive. **Mercy**- CAP money handling courses can be run from the building, as can charitable events. Possibilities with regard to running a Food Bank or teaching people how to cook nutritious meals on a budget come into play when you have a building resource. Christmas meals can be cooked for the lonely or those struggling financially. **Worship**- Musicians can practise, setup is quick, sound quality can be increased, nights of worship can be done, joint worship meetings between Churches etc.

- This is our vision which a building will help facilitate if we embrace the opportunity- are we prepared to work for it? Have we owned it yet? Look on the website there are scriptures regarding our vision- do background study for yourself concerning each of the areas. It is a spiritual checklist as to how we are doing individually and as the Church.

Read next 21 lines from 'A Time to Build' (from Lion Storyteller Bible)

GIVE sacrificially

- Nehemiah was willing to GIVE SACRIFICIALLY. Nehemiah is in Susa (Shushan) in Persia, where Esther was (she was the present king's step-mother). It is now 12 years after Ezra went back and Nehemiah is eagerly awaiting news on how they are getting on. The bad news comes from his brother (Neh 1:2 see also Neh 7:2), Hanani. The news was that God's people who had returned to their homeland were now 'sitting ducks' with no wall of defense against the enemy and surrounded by hostile people on all sides- even gates burned (see Neh 1:3). It was 'out of the frying pan into the fire'- things couldn't get much bleaker.
- Nehemiah was given a position of responsibility and opportunity- cupbearer to the king meant tasting wine first to make sure it was not poisoned. He had to get the King's attention, but he knew that if he appeared sad in front of the king it could mean he would be executed. However he was prepared to risk sacrificing his very life to see God's purposes come to pass. If we are to see God's purposes for this are fulfilled it will mean, like Nehemiah, being willing to lay our lives on God's altar so see His Kingdom come in power. Jesus told us to take up our cross and follow Him- this is the principle of sacrifice. Without personal sacrifice nothing of consequence will get built. The 2nd-century Church Father Tertullian wrote that "the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church" . The Greek word for 'witness' in the New Testament is '*martus*', it is thought the word martyr came from this word because so many Christians were killed for their witnessing.
- Nehemiah also committed to prayer- he prayed intensely with fasting before going to speak to the king. He lived a lifestyle of prayer, as seen throughout the book of Nehemiah. Our prayer life will indicate the mark of our reliance on God. Nehemiah knew without the sacrifice of prayer it would be impossible to fulfill God's purposes

- for His life. We need to remember the same as we embark on this new venture.
- Nehemiah was willing to go and do the work, to act if his prayers were answered- he was prepared to get his hands dirty. As we embark on a building project we all have an important part to play, we may not all have the same gifts or areas of service, but we all think of ways we can serve- giving time, interest, encouragement, finance, prayer, admin and necessary help. We may only have a little to give financially, but let's give the little and God will multiply it like the loaves and fish. The widow's mite was worth more than the greater gifts because it was a greater sacrifice.
 - We can't expect others to give sacrificially if we are not willing first to give as a sacrifice. It was Nehemiah's amazing sacrificial giving that inspired a generation to fulfil the purposes of God- let's do it!
 - Our worship is more than singing songs- Rom 12 says for us to present our bodies to God as living sacrifices and that THIS is our reasonable worship- are we willing like Nehemiah to truly worship God through sacrifice?

Read next 8 lines from 'A Time to Build' (from Lion Storyteller Bible)

TRUST God to do His part

- As we do our part God will do His. If we respond to God and trust Him, He is able to make all things abound to us, just as He did in Nehemiah's situation- what was lacking the King provided- permissions, soldiers, even money and resources to get the work done!
- The wealth of the Nations (Gentiles) was promised by God to Jerusalem through Isaiah the prophet many times- Is 60:5,11;61:6,66:12; also Haggai 2:7 'will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD Almighty.' (NIV), but other versions have 'treasures of all the nations will come'- it is God providing the finances from those who would normally not care about Israel.
- God is likewise able to provide us with gifts, donations and grants from secular sources and unexpected sources as part of His provision, but we must first play our part and give sacrificially.
- God wants to expand our vision of what He wants to do and for us not to be inward looking, we are to be people of influence in our society. John Maxwell the great Christian teacher on leadership defines leadership simply as 'influence'. God wants us to be the head and not the tail, to play a significant part in our society. There was a time not so long back when the Church was the hub of the community in the UK but that is not so now, it has become largely irrelevant in many people's minds as indicated by the recent Census results in Wales. I believe the more people we get into the building on a regular basis the more influence we will have in this community. People will get to see the work we are doing and the meetings they can come to, but presently the Church is invisible to many- they simply have no idea what is going on or what the Church is about. A big issue for many is stepping over the threshold of a Church building, but if we are able to provide a facility for the community of worth we can impact more lives for good.
- With a view to this we want to have a two phases. Phase 1 is simply doing the essential repair jobs to the Church flagged up by the survey, getting things water tight and putting in some internal walls so that we have 2 Sunday school rooms in the vestry, a few more toilets put into the vestry, a better kitchen, possibly putting a temporary ceiling over the balcony area and shutting off the upstairs, keeping downstairs as the main worship area (with a creche added).
- Phase 2 is that the vestry becomes a large coffee bar area, the Sunday school rooms move into the downstairs of the main hall, a couple of offices are added and

storage and a small downstairs hall for youth, mother's and toddlers. There is an additional WC off the downstairs hall suitable for disabled access also. There is a lift added for access upstairs, as well as a rear stairs exit. A floor is put in across the balcony area giving a large upstairs meeting hall suitable for multipurpose use- worship venue, but hireable for appropriate outside events by the community, as is the rest of the building.

- 2 extremes to avoid: first being inward looking and not connecting with our community; secondly being so community focussed we cease to influence society and lose our edge. Our aim is to connect and to clearly preach the gospel message, as set out in our aims.
- There are some unknown quantities at present- we are still obtaining quotes so do not know the overall figure for phase 2, but I would imagine it being in the region of £200,000+. As an idea of the quotes we have had so far- scaffolding £7 grand, heating £30 grand. The unknown quantity is how long it will take to obtain funding for phase 2 and that will dictate whether we need to implement phase 1 or skip straight to phase 2. We have been advised that a project like this can take about 3 years to complete.
- So we must have an expectation just as Nehemiah did that after we have played our part God will provide the rest, let's believe together and see the amazing provision of our God, as He is faithful!

Read next 8 lines from 'A Time to Build' (from Lion Storyteller Bible)

ENDURE through obstacles

- Nehemiah and the Israelites had to exercise endurance to see results.
- Sword in one hand to fight and trowel in other to build. We can't allow the attacks of the enemy to distract us from what God has called us to build.
- The enemy tried to stop Nehemiah and the Israelites from building at various stages using discouragement 'You'll never complete the work', ridicule 'Even a fox could jump over that!', distractions 'You stop the building to come down to an urgent meeting with us' and disunity (the rich charging interest from the poor until Nehemiah put a stop to it).
- Nehemiah tackled each situation head on and encouraged the people to continue to work as a team. He dealt with distractions 'I am about a great work and cannot go down (to side-tracking meetings trying to put a stop to the work).
- Amazingly the work was completed in a record breaking 52 days- the walls all around Jerusalem were finished!
- If we are willing to commit to God's work and to one another in unity God is able to supernaturally speed things up as we commit wholeheartedly to Him and endure through potential obstacles. Let's not become distracted but like Nehemiah did, and like the Nike logo says, 'Just Do It!'

Summary

Achieving our God-given purpose means we:

- **Respond** to God-Opportunities
- **Give** sacrificially
- **Trust** God to do His part
- **Endure** through obstacles

Worship Song and Time of Giving: *Great is Thy Faithfulness*