

## Undeniable Evidence

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Work in Progress / Nehemiah 6:15–7:4

In Nehemiah six and seven, the evidence starts stacking up in plain sight. The wall is finished, and nobody can explain it away. The nations around Jerusalem see the outcome and realize this work wasn't powered by human grit alone, it was accomplished with the help of our God. But the story doesn't end at "completed," because victory still needs guarding as Nehemiah sets leaders in place and secures the gates.

### Introduction

- Most of us live with the assumption that the next few minutes are going to look a lot like the last few minutes.
  - That's how we plan a day. You make the schedule, you run the errands, you get in the car, you get on the plane, and you assume you'll land, grab your bag, and move on with life.
  - And most days, that assumption holds up just fine.
  - But every now and then, something happens that reminds you how quickly "normal" can disappear.
- On January 15, 2009, US Airways Flight 1549 took off from LaGuardia.
  - It was a relatively short flight - just down the coast to Charlotte, the kind people take every day without thinking twice about it.
  - And yes, I'm aware we've had two airplane stories in a matter of weeks.
  - I promise I'm not trying to launch a new ministry called *Fear of Flying Baptist Church*.
  - If you've got a trip coming up, keep your boarding pass.
  - This morning, we're going for awe, not anxiety.
- Not long after takeoff, the Airbus A-320 struck a flock of birds and lost thrust in both engines.

- All of a sudden, what was routine became urgent.
- And you don't have to be a pilot to understand the basic problem.
- When you lose power at low altitude over a city, the biggest issue is time.
- You don't get ten minutes to talk it through.
- You don't get a long list of options.
- Every second changes what's possible, and every decision closes off other decisions.
- In the cockpit were Captain Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger and First Officer Jeff Skiles.
  - They'd trained for emergencies.
  - They'd run procedures. They had experience.
  - But there's still a difference between training for something and suddenly having to live it with real people behind you and no room for error.
- And what happened next is why that story stuck with the country.
  - The plane ended up ditching in the Hudson River.
  - Passengers got out. Boats were nearby and moved in quickly.
  - First responders showed up. And when it was over, everyone on board had survived.
- That's the part that makes people stop and shake their head.
  - Because you can talk about training, and you should.
  - You can talk about composure, and you should.
  - You can talk about experience and good decisions under pressure, and that's all true.
  - But even with all that said, you still look at the outcome and think, "A lot had to line up for that to happen."

- The location mattered. The timing mattered. The fact that help was close mattered.
- The way the rescue unfolded mattered. And the fact that every single person lived is not the ending you expect from that kind of situation.
- All fingers pointed at what should have been a tragedy, but the evidence of that plane floating and passengers escaping down the wings suggests there may have been more at work than just skilled piloting
- And what's interesting is how people responded.
  - A lot of folks called it a miracle.
  - Some people used other words. "Unbelievable." "Incredible." "Lucky."
  - But either way, it produced the same reaction: people paused.
  - People took a breath. For a moment, a busy city and a noisy news cycle got quiet enough to admit, "How did that happen?"
  - There was a lot of undeniable evidence floating down the Hudson that morning.
- Now, I'm not trying to make a technical argument this morning.
  - I'm just pointing out something we all recognize.
  - There are times when something happens and you can't shrug it off as ordinary.
  - You can't reduce it to one explanation.
  - And even if you don't know what to call it, you know what it does to you.
  - It reminds you you're not in charge of as much as you think you are.
  - That brings us back to Nehemiah.
- Because when you get to [Nehemiah 6](#), God's people have been living under pressure.

- They're trying to rebuild this wall, and the opposition has been relentless.
- They've used intimidation. They've used rumors. They've tried distractions.
- They've worked angles behind the scenes.
- The goal has been the same the whole time: get fear inside the builders, because fear will do the stopping for them.
- And if you read it honestly, there are moments where it feels like the bad guys have the advantage.
  - They've got connections. They've got influence. They keep coming at the work from different directions.
  - Meanwhile the people are building, tired, trying to stay focused, trying not to get pulled into all the noise.

### **Scripture Reading**

#### **Nehemiah 6:15–7:4** ESV

<sup>15</sup> So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days.

<sup>16</sup> And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem, for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.

<sup>17</sup> Moreover, in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them.

<sup>18</sup> For many in Judah were bound by oath to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah the son of Arah: and his son Jehohanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah as his wife.

<sup>19</sup> Also they spoke of his good deeds in my presence and reported my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to make me afraid.

<sup>1</sup> Now when the wall had been built and I had set up the doors, and the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed,

<sup>2</sup> I gave my brother Hanani and Hananiah the governor of the castle charge over Jerusalem, for he was a more faithful and God-fearing man than many.

<sup>3</sup> And I said to them, “Let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot. And while they are still standing guard, let them shut and bar the doors. Appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, some at their guard posts and some in front of their own homes.”

<sup>4</sup> The city was wide and large, but the people within it were few, and no houses had been rebuilt.

- Nehemiah drops a sentence that changes the whole feel of the story: “So the wall was finished.”
  - That’s it. No long speech. No big moment.
  - Just the report: it’s done.
  - And what happens next is the part we’re going to pay attention to today.
  - Nehemiah says when the surrounding nations heard about it, their confidence collapsed. The fear shifted.
  - [Nehemiah 6:16](#) (ESV) says, “And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem, for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.”
- In other words, the people who tried to use fear as a weapon were the ones who ended up shaken.
  - The nations looked at a finished wall and had to admit, “We can’t explain that away.”
  - They saw the outcome and, even if they didn’t love God, they at least were forced to recognize His hand.

- The evidence of God's hand was too prevalent to ignore.
- Skeptics will look at this and say it isn't all that impressive.
  - After all, we don't really know the scale of Nehemiah's wall.
  - We know what he tells us in 7:4, that the city was wide and large - which means that it needed a large and wide wall to go around it.
  - How big is wide and large - well, we don't know.
  - We do know it is definitely not narrow or small.
  - We know it wasn't the Great Wall of China...we also know it was more than a lean-to propped up against the side of the Temple.
  - Scholars and archaeologists have differing opinions.
  - The obvious point that Nehemiah is making here is that getting this done in the amount of time it took was clearly evidence of God's hand at work.
  - And clearly it wasn't just Nehemiah that was impressed by the outcome.
  - The evidence of God's hand at work was undeniable - even to all of the surrounding nations.
- We, of all people, should clearly see the miraculous at work here.
  - Just consider how long it takes for modern building projects to unfold.
  - I mean, the GADOT has been working on 100 yards of turning lanes down here on 193 for way more than 52 days, and they've got modern machinery with which to work!
- All of that reminds us of a very important truth this morning...

**Faithful work leaves no doubt. (vv. 15-16)**

- There's no denying the speed with which the builders accomplished this project.
  - I certainly don't want to diminish their hard work.

- If they don't put their hands to the proverbial plow, then this wall doesn't get built.
- At the same time, the miraculous in this isn't miraculous like we often think about.
- There's no reports that stones appeared in their place without human agency, no mortar mixed itself.
- This isn't a Red Sea parting or a Lazarus-leaving-the-grave story.
- The miraculous in this story would come down to the supernatural efficiency with which they worked.
  - Personally, I greatly admire this aspect of the story.
  - I don't think I'm alone in this, but I can't do any kind of project at home with any kind of miraculous efficiency.
  - If I can get something done at home with only one trip to Ace, Home Depot, or Lowes, then I might start talking about miraculous efficiency.
- And don't forget, they had to work around late summer heat - Nehemiah said that this work was finished near the end of Elul.
  - That corresponds to early September on our calendars.
  - That means that the 52-day project took place in most of July, all of August. In Jerusalem.
  - Not exactly the coolest place on the planet.
  - And, don't forget there was a famine going on at the same time... famine implies that the weather is even hotter and drier than normal.
- And, they had to work while being constantly armed.
  - Back in ch. 4, we read about Nehemiah's provisions for protection.
  - Half his work force was devoted to guard duty while half was actually doing the work.

- All of that to say, there were plenty of reasons why this should have taken much longer and only one clear reason that it got finished so quickly.
- And that fact wasn't lost on their watching neighbors.
  - They saw the daily progress.
  - They saw the challenges and problems overcome.
  - They perceived that the builders had help.
  - The evidence was right there in front of their eyes.
  - It's kind of like a fully loaded passenger jet landing in the Hudson River - there's GOT to be more at work here than just skill.
- Obviously today, we're not impressing our neighbors with the speed in which we complete building campaigns.
  - But I don't think that's the point.
  - The wall is important - but ultimately, in Nehemiah's story, the wall is simply the backdrop on which Nehemiah's story is told.
  - Nehemiah is about overcoming opposition and working together as a community of faith.
  - Nehemiah is about dealing with the very real challenges of honoring the Lord in this community.
  - So yes, the wall getting finished is impressive - but what is truly impressive is the fact that THIS group of people are able to see it through to completion.
- I think it is fair to ask this question in light of what we see here in these verses.
- If our neighbors were to look at the evidence in our lives and in our community, would they be drawn to Christ?
  - That is ultimately what is going on as the wall is completed.
    - Here is the evidence...what do you see?

- Their neighbors saw the hand of God.
- What evidence are we providing to a watching world to consider?
- As individuals...
  - What do your friends and family see in your life that points them to Christ?
  - Do they see a faith that is more than surface level or do they see a deep abiding love for Christ?
  - Your friends and family see you at your worst, so when they see you there, do they see someone who desperately clings to Christ when life is the hardest?
  - Do they see a life that is consistently marked by things like...
    - ...love, joy, peace?
    - What about patience and kindness?
    - Surely they will see goodness, faithfulness, gentleness.
    - What about self control?
  - Those are all indicators of a life that is controlled by the Spirit of God.
    - When those indicators are absent, I can assure you of this...
    - You're not pointing people to Christ.
  - Nobody is looking at someone whose life is marked by hatefulness, despair, hostility, irritability, harshness, wickedness, unreliability, aggressiveness, and impulsiveness and saying, "I want more of what they've got."
    - The reality is that nobody is getting close to you if that's what defines you.
    - Except maybe other people who live like that.
- What do your neighbors see in you?

- Yesterday I saw my first “Easter at...” advertisement.
- And in the next couple of weeks, you’ll undoubtedly see yard signs going up in people’s yards.
- It occurred to me how dangerous those signs are.
- If you’re a bad neighbor, don’t you think for a second that advertising that your church is indeed meeting on Easter is going to suddenly erase the fact that you don’t know your neighbors by name and haven’t done more than just wave at them when they’re getting their mail.
- What do your colleagues, coworkers, and classmates see in you?
  - Do they see somebody who cuts corners or rides the clock?
  - Do they see somebody who borrows office supplies and never seems to replace them?
  - Do they see somebody who is constantly jockeying and politicking for positions and promotions?
  - What do these actions say about our commitment to Christ?
- As a community?
  - In Nehemiah, they saw a community that was sold out to a common purpose.
    - It wasn’t always easy.
    - There were serious challenges that had to be overcome.
    - But that community rose above the challenges and did something that even their neighbors knew had to come from the LORD.
  - That doesn’t really work today...
  - So what does our community do that points people to Christ?
  - Is it a community that is characterized by love?

- Remember Jesus' words...I mentioned them a couple of weeks ago.

**John 13:34–35 ESV**

<sup>34</sup> A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

<sup>35</sup> By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

- Is it a community that is characterized by a commitment to the Gospel?
  - And it's got to be a community that is committed to the Gospel BEYOND our dollars.
  - This month, we're participating in the AAEO to support the work we're doing to reach the US and Canada with the Gospel.
  - But we've got to do more than just send our dollars.
  - Our dollars are vital. But our participation is more than just via dollars.
- One of the hardest questions I am constantly asking myself is this...
  - If CVBC voted at the end of the service today to close its doors effective immediately, would the community grieve it, celebrate it, or be indifferent to it?
  - If we're not pointing people to Christ as a community, then our absence wouldn't make a hill-of-beans difference in the 4 or 5 zip codes that are represented in this room today.
- They may not say it, but the world is watching, and they're looking for evidence.
  - If we were criminals, we would be doing everything we could to cover up the evidence.
  - God has called us to the exact opposite.

- We have been called to be sloppy with that evidence. We're not concealing it. We're making it known.
- Leave it lying out in the open. Leave the fingerprints. Forget the alibi. Leave a paper trail.
- If a watching world is conducting an investigation, then may our commitment to Christ be as obvious as the wall around Jerusalem or the survivors standing on the wings of the plane in the Hudson River.
- May all of the evidence we leave behind make it clear that there is DEFINITELY something different about these people and about this church.
- And may all of the fingerprints belong to hands that still bear the scars of crucifixion.
- Back to Nehemiah...

**In spite of the completed work, we know that Nehemiah's opponents don't rest.**

- We talked about this last week.
  - Tobiah had some mafia connections or something with some of the leaders of Judah.
  - Even with Tobiah's letter campaign and all the associated noise, the wall still got built.
  - That was still part of his fear strategy to keep Nehemiah off kilter. Suffice it to say, this strategy failed.
- But we get to chapter 7 and we get a kind of summary of how everything stands.
  - Wall finished.
  - Doors in place.
  - Guards assigned.
  - Leadership delegated.

- Policies enacted.
- Nehemiah knew his enemies were going to give up, so he put a plan in place to monitor things.
  - They weren't going to close the city off, but it wasn't going to be a 24/7 circus either.
  - They've done a lot of work, they've seen God's hand do remarkable things.
  - They recognized that they have a responsibility to be good stewards of the work that was accomplished.
  - Yes, they had to be committed to the project...but they also had to be committed beyond the project as well.
- During construction, faithfulness meant building and guarding...
  - It meant long days in the hot sun.
  - It meant calluses and blisters.
  - But now it means keeping schedules, managing people, standing guard.
  - It probably meant a lot of boring days.
  - But it was no less important than stacking stones and mixing mortar.
- And that is a good reminder:

**Seasons change; the evidence should stay consistent (7:1-4)**

- I always get nervous when I see football players celebrate after they score a touchdown.
  - I'm all for celebrating, don't get me wrong.
  - But how much is too much?
  - Is there a snippy ref watching with a hankering to throw a flag for excessive celebration.

- You get so caught up in the moment that you forget that your special teams is about to come on the field, and then the defense has to come out.
- As Christians, we walk through this life and it has different seasons.
  - There are times when you're building the wall
  - And then there are times when you're guarding the gates.
  - But regardless of the time and the season, the evidence in our lives should still point to Christ.
- For Nehemiah, the same God that gave these people the miraculous wall build is the same God that is going to sustain them through the long arduous days of standing guard.
  - Nowhere near as exciting - but still an opportunity to show daily faithfulness in the small and mundane.
  - If we're honest, most of our lives are lived in that season...the mundane, day-to-day.
  - It is easy for the evidence to point to Christ on the mission trip or at camp or even in those BIG, all-hands-on-deck activities like VBS or a Church Workday.
  - But most of the time, it's not that.
- But life doesn't have to be miraculous for you to show evidence of God's faithfulness and care.
  - Life doesn't have to be a dramatic rescue in the Hudson River.
  - Truth be told, the evidence the ongoing, steady, consistent witness of God's people is just as credible as the dramatic, once-in-a-lifetime moment.
  - I'll never forget the day nearly 20 years ago that I shared the Gospel in a town square in the middle of this little village in the mountains of Veracruz, Mexico.

- When I finished preaching, dozens of people gave their lives to Christ.
- Nothing like that has ever happened to me again.
- It was truly life changing.
- But it was likely a once-in-a-lifetime moment for me.
- My prayer today is that I will be faithful in the hundreds of thousands of ordinary moments that fill the space between the extraordinary.
- And that should be true for each one of us.

### **Invitation**

- On the crime shows, they always have that bulletin board, right?
  - Pictures pinned up, notes scribbled in the margins, and red string running everywhere.
  - It looks chaotic at first, but the goal is simple: when you step back and look at it all together, the evidence starts pointing in one direction.
  - One conclusion. Who did it? What really happened?
- And here's the thing: in court, they don't want "maybe."
  - They want *undeniable*. They want enough clarity that when the jury sees the whole picture, they don't have to guess.
  - They may not like the conclusion, but they can't pretend the evidence isn't there.
- So let me ask it this way. If a spiritual investigator took the last twenty years of your life and started pinning things to the board...what would show up?
  - The decisions you've made. The patterns you've repeated.
  - The way you handle pressure. The way you treat people when nobody's watching.
  - The things you celebrate. The things you excuse.

- The conversations you have, and the ones you avoid.
- The words that come out when you're tired. The instincts that take over when you're afraid.
- If they could pull up the "paper trail" of your life, what would the board say?
- Would the evidence point to Christ...or to something less?
- And I don't just mean, "Did you have a religious phase?" I mean: when someone steps back and looks at the pattern, is there a steady trail that says, "This person belongs to Jesus"?
  - Not perfection. Not spotless performance. But a real, Spirit-shaped direction.
  - A life that keeps circling back to repentance. A conscience that won't stay comfortable in sin.
  - A growing desire for what honors God. A humility that comes back to the cross when it's wrong.
- Because here's what Nehemiah shows us: when God is at work, it becomes visible.
  - Even the nations around them could see it.
  - They might not have wanted to admit it, but they couldn't deny it.
  - "They perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God."
- So today, here's the invitation.
  - If your evidence board wouldn't point to Christ, don't fix that with speeches.
  - Don't fix it with image management. Bring it into the light. Start with honesty.
  - If you've never come to Christ, the invitation is simple: come to Him.

- Not with your résumé. With your need. With your sin. With your emptiness. With your fear.
- Christ doesn't save people who have it together, He saves people who know they don't.
- Turn from sin and trust in Him. He lived for you, died for you, rose for you, and He welcomes sinners who come to Him for mercy.
- And if you *are* a believer, then maybe the invitation is this: let God straighten the pattern.
  - Some of us have a board full of contradictions. We love the Lord, but we've let certain habits stay.
  - We've gotten sloppy with our words. We've grown careless with our obedience.
  - The wall is "finished," so to speak, but the gates aren't guarded. And the Lord, in kindness, is calling you back to steady faithfulness.
- So take a moment right now and ask: what would need to change for the evidence of my life to be clearer?
  - What's one area where I've been drifting? What's one gate I need to set back in place?
  - What's one conversation I need to have? What's one confession I need to make?
- Because the goal is not to impress a jury.
  - The goal is to honor Christ. And the beautiful truth of the gospel is that Jesus doesn't just forgive our past, He reshapes our future.
  - He doesn't just erase guilt, He forms a new pattern.
- So let's come to Him.
  - Some for salvation.
  - Some for repentance.
  - Some for renewed steadiness.

- And let's ask God to make our lives the kind of evidence that points unmistakably to Christ.