

Moving Day

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Work in Progress / Nehemiah 11–12

On “Moving Day,” we discover that God’s work isn’t complete when something is rebuilt—it’s complete when His people step in and live it out. In Nehemiah 11–12, the people of God are called to leave comfort behind, settle where they’re needed, and become part of what God is doing. Their obedience leads to a moment of powerful, public joy as the city is filled and the walls are dedicated. Because in God’s kingdom, the greatest celebrations are built on the quiet faithfulness of people willing to move when He calls.

Introduction - Clip from *End of the Spear*

- That clip captures a moment most of us will never experience—and if we’re honest, probably wouldn’t choose.
 - What you just watched is a scene from *End of the Spear*.
 - The man stepping into that airplane is Nate Saint, a missionary pilot serving in Ecuador in the 1950s.
 - And that moment—walking away from his wife and children, climbing into that small aircraft, and flying off toward the jungle—that wasn’t routine.
 - That wasn’t casual. That was costly.
- Nate and the other missionaries believed God was calling them to take the gospel to the Huaorani people, a tribe that was known for its isolation and violence.
 - They knew the risks. They weren’t unaware.
 - They weren’t chasing adrenaline or trying to prove something.
 - They were simply convinced that obedience to God mattered more than their own comfort, safety, or plans.
 - And as history tells us, that obedience led to their deaths.
- Now, if we’re not careful, we can look at a story like that and quietly file it away in a category labeled “extreme Christianity.”

- We think, *That's for missionaries. That's for the especially called. That's not really about me.*
- But here's the reality: while most of us will never be asked to walk into something that dangerous, every single one of us will be asked to walk away from something comfortable.
- Because following God has always involved movement.
- It means leaving what is familiar.
- It means stepping into places we didn't choose.
- It means rearranging our lives around what God is doing, rather than asking God to fit into what we were already planning.
- And that's not just true in a jungle in Ecuador, that's exactly where [Nehemiah 11](#) and 12 meet us.
 - By the time we get to these chapters, the walls of Jerusalem have been rebuilt.
 - The opposition has been overcome.
 - Spiritually, the people have responded to God's Word.
 - On the surface, everything looks complete.
 - But there's a problem.
- The city is still mostly empty.
 - The work isn't finished just because something has been built.
 - It isn't finished until people are willing to step in and live inside what God has established.
 - So what happens next is not dramatic.
 - There are no enemies. No battles. No miracles.
 - Just...people moving.
- And that might not sound like much, until you realize what that actually meant.

- These weren't people upgrading their situation.
- These weren't people chasing convenience.
- They were being asked to leave what was familiar and step into something that was unfinished, uncertain, and difficult.
- In other words—this wasn't a real estate decision. This was an act of obedience.
- And that's where we see the first reality of Moving Day.
 - And the question that sits underneath both that clip and this text is the same:
 - Will we be the kind of people who admire what God is doing from a distance or the kind of people who are willing to rearrange our lives to be part of it?
- I began this series back in September with a sermon titled Demolition Day.
 - We went back to 2 Chronicles to look at how Jerusalem was depopulated and destroyed.
 - And now, as we move toward the end of this series, we come to a different kind of day.
 - A day when the city was repopulated and restored, for the glory of God and the good of his people.
 - I'll be working through both [Nehemiah 11](#) and 12 today as these two chapters include a lot of names and places in between the story.
 - Please stand as I read a few excerpts from both chapters.

Scripture Reading

Nehemiah 11:1–2 ESV

¹ Now the leaders of the people lived in Jerusalem. And the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to live in Jerusalem the holy city, while nine out of ten remained in the other towns.

² And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem.

Nehemiah 12:27–28 *ESV*

²⁷ And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, with thanksgivings and with singing, with cymbals, harps, and lyres.

²⁸ And the sons of the singers gathered together from the district surrounding Jerusalem and from the villages of the Netophathites;

Nehemiah 12:44–47 *ESV*

⁴⁴ On that day men were appointed over the storerooms, the contributions, the firstfruits, and the tithes, to gather into them the portions required by the Law for the priests and for the Levites according to the fields of the towns, for Judah rejoiced over the priests and the Levites who ministered.

⁴⁵ And they performed the service of their God and the service of purification, as did the singers and the gatekeepers, according to the command of David and his son Solomon.

⁴⁶ For long ago in the days of David and Asaph there were directors of the singers, and there were songs of praise and thanksgiving to God.

⁴⁷ And all Israel in the days of Zerubbabel and in the days of Nehemiah gave the daily portions for the singers and the gatekeepers; and they set apart that which was for the Levites; and the Levites set apart that which was for the sons of Aaron.

- Back in [Jeremiah 29](#), the prophet wrote a letter to all of the Israelites who were exiled into Babylon.
 - In the letter, he admonished the people to work for the welfare of the city of their exile.
 - They were to build their homes and build their families.
 - Jeremiah understood that a city was only as healthy as its citizens.

- And in order for an ancient city to function, it had to have people, all contributing to the welfare of the city.
- Now the exile is over, the people are no longer living in Babylon - instead they've returned.
 - Throughout this series, we've watched as these people have made huge strides in rebuilding what Nebuchadnezzar destroyed.
 - The temple is built and functioning.
 - The walls around the city are restored.
 - The gates and the city squares tell us that the streets are open for moving about the city.
 - But a major component of a functioning city is still missing...the people.
- We're told in the beginning of ch. 11 that the leaders have settled in Jerusalem.
 - But nobody else has made the city their home.
 - In our modern context, this might be akin to Atlanta - but the only people who live there are people who work for the State of Georgia.
 - While that might help traffic considerably, it does pose a problem because there's nobody to run the grocery store, nobody who can fix something when it stops working.
 - It might look like a city, but it definitely isn't functioning like one.
- Today, if somebody talked about moving into a city, they might talk about how convenient it is.
 - Everything is close and convenient.
 - But in Jerusalem, those who move into the city are going to have to actually build all of the things necessary to make the city actually thrive.

- So moving into Jerusalem was going to be incredibly challenging for those who answered the call.

Answering the Call to Move (11:1-9)

- But there was a plan to make it happen.
- Jerusalem's newest residents are selected by casting lots.
 - Now that might sound strange to us—casting lots. It almost sounds like chance.
 - But in Scripture, it wasn't about randomness—it was about trust.
 - [Proverbs 16:33](#) says, 'The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.'
 - In other words, they believed God was guiding the outcome.
 - You don't see lots being used anymore after Pentecost because God sent his Holy Spirit to reveal his will, which is why we don't use lots today.
- Based on the lot, 1 out of 10 residents would relocate their home and their family to the city.
 - The other 90% would remain in the countryside and smaller villages.
 - They would have a very different kind of life.
 - But even the 90% would still support the welfare of the city through the raising of crops and flocks.
- The bible doesn't tell us who came up with the plan - Nehemiah isn't directly credited with the solution.
 - The text almost makes it sound like this is more of a grassroots solution.
 - It says that the people cast lots.
 - Verse 2 talks about those who willingly offered to move into the city.

- All of that to say that nothing about this feels coerced or incentivized.
- It genuinely feels like a group of people working to understand God's plan for their future.
- These people provide a real-life example of what it means to follow the LORD even when doing so comes with a cost.
 - Nothing about moving into the city was going to be easy, but the people selected for the task received their calling with willingness.
 - We think back to those missionaries in Ecuador.
 - Their calling was going to be anything but easy.
 - In fact, they would be called to give their lives for the sake of the Huaorani people.
 - But they understood the cost and were willing to pay it.
- God's call upon our lives is not guaranteed to be free from discomfort and difficulty.
 - In fact, I think the overwhelming argument from scripture is that God's call is going to lead us into discomfort FAR more frequently than it leads us into comfort.
 - That is far removed from our civilizational ideals.
 - We spend our lives working for prosperity and financial stability so we can, at some point, achieve some level of comfort.
 - Comfort isn't the enemy but when comfort becomes the priority, we start missing the call.
- If nobody ever answered the call to discomfort, then nobody ever answers the missionary call.
 - Nobody ever answers the call to serve to be a pastor.
 - If nobody ever answered the call to discomfort, then let's go ahead and acknowledge that we no longer have children's ministries or church nurseries or Christian counselors.

- When Jesus began his public ministry, one of the first things he did was choose men to follow him.
 - Matthew's gospel records the dramatic moment that Jesus called Peter and Andrew.
 - He invited them to become fishers of men and [Matthew 4:20](#) records their response...

Matthew 4:20 *ESV*

²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

- They would give up their livelihood, their identity for the sake of the call.
- And let's not ignore the fact that they would face quite a bit of hardship because of their decision to follow Jesus.
- Relocating into Jerusalem was going to be a challenge, but it was a challenge the people embraced because they knew that it was God's call upon their lives.
 - And once you embrace the call, the next part is the fun part...

Finding Your Place in the City (11:10-36)

- Starting in verse 10, you begin to see something take shape. It's not just names—it's a city coming to life."
 - And even if you cheat and don't take times to look at all the names, you do start to see all of the jobs that are being taken care of.
 - You've got priests and Levites.
 - You've got gatekeepers and singers.
 - But that's just scratching the surface.
 - Because a real city needs more than worship leaders.
 - It needs blacksmiths and carpenters.
 - Bakers and butchers.

- Potters and weavers.
- People who build things.
- People who fix things.
- People who make life work.
- All of these people were going to be necessary in this work of restoring this great city.
- Every single one of them had a role to play in what God was doing.
- But it's not just those who have to open up shop inside the city.
 - Starting in v. 25, we learn about those who remain in the neighboring villages.
 - They are the ones who are maintaining the fields and the farms necessary to support the city.
 - They may not be in the hustle and bustle of the markets every day, but you better believe their job is critical.
 - When you go to the grocery store, you see all of the food on display.
 - You may never see where it comes from, but you better be thankful that there's a field or a greenhouse somewhere growing something that went into making whatever it is that you're buying.
- All of these diverse gifts, callings, and responsibilities are absolutely necessary for the health of this city - and it's not hard to see the same principles at work in the church today.
- Thinking back to missionaries in Ecuador - it wasn't just five preachers. Each of those missionaries had unique gifts and responsibilities.
 - Jim Elliot - no doubt was the preacher/communicator in the group.
 - But Jim Elliot never makes contact with the Huarani people without men like:
 - Nate Saint, the guy that flew the plane

- Roger Youderian was the guy who had experience with indigenous peoples.
- If you are a follower of Christ, God has gifted you in a couple of very specific ways.
 - First - he has gifted you with spiritual gifts.
 - I don't have time to do a sermon today on spiritual gifts.
 - But I will echo what Paul says in [1 Corinthians 12:7](#)

1 Corinthians 12:7 *ESV*
⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.
 - You've got something to contribute to the Body of Christ and it is a product of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.
 - I'm going to say this and it may sound harsh...but I don't mean it to hurt your feelings.
 - Some of us are really good at consuming FROM the body of Christ without doing much to contribute TO the body of Christ.
 - Second - he has gifted you with influence.
 - I'm not talking about you selling stuff to your followers on TikTok.
 - I'm talking the circle where your light shines.
 - This is your workplace, the civic organizations you belong to, your sports teams.
 - It is where you do what you're good at and where you do the things you enjoy.
 - Those aren't just pursuits for your pleasure, they're mission fields to be leveraged.
- And part of finding your place in the city is learning how to put those gifts to work for the good of the city.

- In Jerusalem, they needed all kinds of different people with different skills and gifts to make the city thrive.
- That's no different than the church today.
- Different context, different time, same need.
- But by God's grace, he's provided for that need through his people.
- You may not recognize the name LIEUTENANT SAMUEL PARRIS.
 - That's okay, I wouldn't expect you to.
 - He's my great, great, great, great, great, great grandfather.
 - Born in 1755, lived into his 90s, and from what I can tell, likely fought in the American Revolution.
 - I only know that because someone took the time to preserve that record.
 - So while that name may not mean much to you... it's part of *my* story.
- And that's exactly what's happening in [Nehemiah 12](#).
 - These aren't random names.
 - This is a record, a testimony.
 - A way of saying—*these people were here... and they mattered*.
 - Because what God is about to do is worth remembering.
- Now step into chapter 12:
 - Because when you get to verse 27, everything shifts.
 - All the movement, all the sacrifice, all the people finding their place.
 - it leads to this moment.
 - The dedication of the wall.
- And for the first time in a long time, the city doesn't just function it celebrates.

Celebrating what God has Built (12:27-47)

- This isn't a quiet polite moment.
 - This is loud and public.
 - This is a city coming alive with worship.
 - You've got singers and instruments.
 - You've got processions and parades marching along the top of the wall.
 - The text says this was heard from far away.
 - That's not just volume - that's overflow.
 - That's what happens when God's people see his work completed.
 - **The psalmist wrote:**

Psalm 126:1-2 ESV

¹ When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.

² Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then they said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them."

- But don't miss this - this moment didn't just happen.
 - This is a celebration that is built on everything we've been working toward through this whole series.
 - It stands on people who had a burden they couldn't shake.
 - Remember Nehemiah from way back in chapter 1 and 2 when he heard about the city and couldn't let it go.
 - It stands on people who were willing to move.
 - Obviously, Nehemiah's willingness to leave Persia.

- But even in today's text, the 10%'s willingness to relocate to the city.
- It stands on people who were willing to find their place.
 - Both in the rebuilding of the wall when EVERYBODY had to pitch in to make it happen.
 - And in the restoration of the city when everybody got to find their unique place of service.
- It stands on people who embraced their responsibility, even when it was difficult, uncomfortable, or inconvenient.
- Here's the truth - obedience to God doesn't end in burden, it leads to joy.
 - It may begin with discomfort.
 - It may have a lot of hard days.
 - But obedience ends in delight.
 - In [John 15:10-11](#), Jesus said:

John 15:10–11 ESV

¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

- Jesus is clear here, obedience and joy aren't two separate things.
- They're connected. They're related.
- If you're lacking in joy - one of the first places you need to look at it your obedience.
- When I was my last semester in seminary, I was struggling at the little church I was serving.
 - At the same time, I was being groomed to become the executive director of a large, parachurch ministry in Birmingham, AL.

- For a long while, I was seriously considering leaving the pulpit so I could pursue that executive role. And I was miserable.
- I was looking to take the easy way, the path of least resistance. The path that God wasn't leading me down.
- For me, the path that looked to be the easiest was still a good thing - but it wasn't what God wanted from me.
- Had I gone that direction, I don't know where it would have ended, but I can tell you it would have been a miserable path to walk.
- When you step into what God has called you to do, when you stop resisting and start obeying, you can begin to experience the life he designed for you.
 - Not because everything is easy, but because everything is aligned.
 - It is aligned with how you have been gifted.
 - It is aligned with God's greater kingdom purposes.
 - It is aligned with God's unique purpose for your life.
- These people didn't just move into a city, they moved into God's plan.
 - And when they did, the result wasn't just a functioning city.
 - It wasn't that the trash got picked up and the roads got paved.
 - This was a city that was rejoicing.
- Some of us want the joy of chapter 12 without the obedience of chapter 11.
 - We want celebration without relocation.
 - Nehemiah reminds us that the joy we're looking for is very likely waiting on the other side of our obedience.

Conclusion

- When those missionaries landed on that sandbar in Ecuador, they didn't know how the story would end.

- They had counted the cost.
- They had wrestled with the risk.
- But they chose to go anyway.
- And just a few days later, their bodies were found on that very beach.
- By every human measure, it looked like a failure.
- A waste.
- A story that ended too soon.
- But that's not how God writes stories.
 - Because what looked like the end was actually the beginning.
 - In the years that followed, the very people who took their lives would hear the gospel by the very lips of those who were most tragically impacted by these murders...the wives and children of those martyrs.
 - And many would believe.
 - That's the kind of thing God does.
 - He takes obedience that looks costly, and turns it into something eternal.
- And in [Nehemiah 11](#) and 12, we see the same pattern—just in a different setting.
 - People leave what is comfortable.
 - People step into roles they didn't choose.
 - People give themselves to something bigger than themselves.
 - And what begins as sacrifice, ends in celebration.
 - The walls are filled.
 - The city is alive.
 - And the sound of joy rises so loudly, it can be heard from far away.

- Because true obedience to God does not end in loss.
 - It leads to joy.
 - It may begin with discomfort.
 - It may require you to leave something behind.
 - It may ask more of you than you expected.
 - But on the other side of obedience, there is always something better than what you gave up.
- So here's the question:
 - Are you standing outside the city admiring what God is doing from a distance?
 - Or are you willing to move?
 - To step into the place He's calling you?
 - To take hold of the role He's given you?
- Jim Elliot once wrote,
 - "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."
 - That's what "Moving Day" is all about.
 - Letting go of what you were never meant to hold onto so you can step into what God has been building all along.
 - So the question isn't whether God is building something.
 - The question is what is He asking *you* to leave so you can step into it?