

Rebuild

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Let's open our Bibles today to Nehemiah chapter two. Nehemiah chapter two. Some of you are here for the very first time. I want to welcome you to worship at Watkinsville, and already you've experienced a lot of what happens here week after week in this place. Hopefully you're greeted at the door and been able to get here and meet some people that are new. We've sung together, we've given, we're opening God's word. And I was sitting there thinking just a moment ago that I've met nine people this morning that I'd never met before. And it's great to have new people coming to be a part of worship here at Watkinsville. A lot of you maybe are dealing with traffic in the parking lot, maybe you had to park in the grass or a wet spot. Sorry for that. We're just kind of like the County fair around here sometimes. You've got to wait in line and park in some wet spots. But we're glad you're here. I'd love to meet you before you get away. I hang around here at the front after the message, you could stop by and say hello. The Sunday paper that you received has a connect card that's a part of it and I'd love for you to complete it and take it to our next steps station out in the Commons, and we want to put a gift in your hand before you leave. It'll give us a chance to be able to stick some things in the mail for you and let you know a little bit more about what's going on in the life of Watkinsville.

A lot of your college students in this room, some of you already know this, you've been there already today. We have college Bible study at 9:00 AM. They're studying through the book of Ecclesiastes. Pastor Vic is teaching in there. A lot of you've come from there into this room for our corporate worship. And if you are a college student and you weren't a part of college Bible study, we'd love for you to do both hours. We'd love for you to come and meet some people, fellowship and hear the word taught, and then come on in here to our all church gathering of worship. Each week at nine that college Bible study is available as well.

What's broken around you? Maybe you notice something in society that's broken and it's really burdening your heart and God may be calling you to be the person to lead the rebuilding of that. What's broken with you? What's broken in you? We're studying through this book of Nehemiah, we're in the second week and we're taking this theme of "Re-build." The impact of one person who's burdened for the glory of God. And perhaps God would burden your heart about something that's broken around you, with you, or in you. And this would be the beginning of that being rebuilt in your life. Maybe it's a relationship with your parents, or your spouse, or your children. Maybe your career is broken. Maybe your finances are broken. Maybe your dreams have crumbled. The good news of Nehemiah is that broken things can be rebuilt by the power of God. And the story of Nehemiah is that if we're committed to the glory of God, He will do his work to rebuild what's broken. If you're okay with God being the hero in your marriage, if you're okay with God getting the glory in your work, if you're okay with God being on the throne of your life, God is willing and able to rebuild what is broken.

There's a lot of hope in the book of Nehemiah. We saw last week that God rebuilds broken things, and we saw Nehemiah burdened and broken himself. He was weeping and mourning and fasting because he got the news that his people were in trouble and shame, and it seemed to be that God started putting in his heart that he was to go and help rebuild the walls around Jerusalem. To rebuild those walls would establish security, it would give them their identity, it

would help them identify as this as a nation of God. God's glory would no longer be hidden. God's glory would be bright and loud. And the rest of the story is that Nehemiah led the people to rebuild the Gates of the city in 52 days. Let's get to it. Chapter two, we head from chapter one, his brokenness, his prayers, his burden his weeping, his fasting. Chapter two verse one,

“In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, I took up the wine and gave it to the king.”

Nehemiah was the cupbearer. He stood between poisonous wine and poisonous food and the King. He was the one that made sure the King and the queen would be safe regarding what they would eat or drink.

Now I had not been sad in his presence. ² And the king said to me, “Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart.” Then I was very much afraid. ³ I said to the king, “Let the king live forever! Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' graves, lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?” ⁴ Then the king said to me, “What are you requesting?” So I prayed to the God of heaven. ⁵ And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' graves, that I may rebuild it.” ⁶ And the king said to me (the queen sitting beside him), “How long will you be gone, and when will you return?” So it pleased the king to send me when I had given him a time. ⁷ And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province Beyond the River, that they may let me pass through until I come to Judah, ⁸ and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress of the temple, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy.” And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me.

Nehemiah Inspects Jerusalem's Walls

⁹ Then I came to the governors of the province Beyond the River and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen. ¹⁰ But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant heard this, it displeased them greatly that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel.

¹¹ So I went to Jerusalem and was there three days. ¹² Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. And I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem. There was no animal with me but the one on which I rode. ¹³ I went out by night by the Valley Gate to the Dragon Spring and to the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that were broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire. ¹⁴ Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but there was no room for the animal that was under me to pass. ¹⁵ Then I went up in the night by the valley and inspected the wall, and I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned. ¹⁶ And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, and I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest who were to do the work.

¹⁷ Then I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision.” ¹⁸ And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that

the king had spoken to me. And they said, "Let us rise up and build." So they strengthened their hands for the good work.

Let's stop right there. There's a lot of drama in this chapter. We saw Nehemiah broken in chapter one, he comes to chapter two and he's before the King. The day has come. When the King recognizes his sadness, he's ready with an answer. He prays, "Lord help me." And then he tells the King what he needs. The King grants safe passage, and Nehemiah goes to Jerusalem. He inspects the walls, he speaks to the people and they're with him. They've heard the speech, they've heard the talk, and they're like, "Let's do it. Let's build, let's go." This morning we may be right there where those people are as you think about something that's broken in your life and you're so hungry for it to be repaired and restored, and you think, "I need it today, I want my marriage back today. I want things like they were today. I want my career today. Can we start today? Let's rebuild this. I got to get this today." What I want you to see this morning is before the people ever said, "Let us rise up and build," that there was a lot of waiting time for Nehemiah and the people.

Today I want you to see that when God rebuilds things, that there is often a lot of waiting time before there is going time. There's a lot of time that we have to be patient. We use this in our everyday conversation, and you know how this statement goes, "Wow, that man, that woman, they have the patience of Job." And that was even picked up in the New Testament by James, in James chapter five. He said, here's an example of patience and perseverance and suffering. Look at all that Job went through and his perseverance and his patience. I want to offer to you today that in the story of rebuilding that we know so well here from Nehemiah, this picture of leadership from Nehemiah, that another person could go in that blank. Do we have the patience of Nehemiah? Do we have the patience of Nehemiah? There is a place for patience in the rebuilding of broken things. There's a time of waiting in the rebuilding of broken things. You'll get easily discouraged and easily depressed and you want to quit and give up and not fight for it anymore if you miss this principle of patience in God's work of rebuilding.

Let me give you this take home sentence. Let me give you this summary statement, a big idea here. If you leave early or drift away, grab a hold of this statement. God is powerfully working when we are patiently waiting. God is powerfully working when we are patiently waiting. Now the temptation for us is to see something that's broken. See a need, see a cause, see something that has crumbled and fallen apart, and we see it, we recognize it and we want to take things into our own hand. We want to go after it and fix it and make it right. We want to take things into our own hand, and we can run ahead of God. We can try to carry the load ourselves. We want to make something happen now. If all of y'all would just get in line and go with me, we can do something here. There is a pattern of patience in Nehemiah's life and I want you to see that, this pattern of patience.

When you read Nehemiah chapter one they're introductory comments. It's like a memoir. It's not like an auto biography. He's telling us about an event in his life and he says in verse one chapter one, "Now it happened in the month of Kislev, in the 20th year." Turn the page to chapter two, we figure out what's wrong. We're ready to start rebuilding. Verse one of chapter two starts in the month of Nissan in the 20th year of King Artaxerxes. It's easy to read right on into the story and get to the exciting parts and miss that phrase, "In the month of Kislev, 20th year" and, "In the month of Nissan, 20th year." If you've studied Nehemiah a lot and you're really familiar with this book, you know already where I'm headed with this. Or maybe you have a PhD in ancient calendar studies. I don't know, but people tell me that in the Hebrew calendar,

Kislev to Nissan is four months. Four months of praying and fasting and weeping and mourning. In Nehemiah's life from the time gets to word about what is broken, he's doing his job. He's working, he's praying, he's fasting, he's sad, he's before the King as cup bearer, and from Kislev to Nissan there's no conversation with the King. Nothing appears to be happening out here visibly, and then he speaks to the King. Four months, four months.

I mean, just think about it even from last Sunday when we started talking about things being rebuilt, how frustrated we might be tempted to be to get to today and think of all those things that are not back together yet. Four months before he has the first conversation with the King. There's another pattern here. Susa to Jerusalem. Nehemiah was in Susa serving the pagan King. He needed to go to Jerusalem in order to build the walls. I'm told that that's about 800 miles. In our day we could do that in an hour and a half on a jet, but in his day, I'm told that would take at least two months. It's at least a two month journey.

And so from the time where Nehemiah gets to the report to the time that he shows up in Jerusalem, it's at least, at least, six months before any first steps in the city. And then he gets to Jerusalem, four months of weeping, praying and fasting. Then two months perhaps of travel, he gets to Jerusalem and he walks into the city and he's just kind of like, "Hey, let's go, let's go, let's go." But he gets to Jerusalem and what does he do? It says in verse 11, "So I went to Jerusalem and I was there three days." Four months, two months, three days. Look in verse 12, "Then I rose in the night." Maybe he was resting, maybe he was praying, maybe he was thinking, maybe he was pulling thoughts together. And then he takes one night and he just rides around without people knowing where he is, by himself.

You see this pattern of patience, four months, two months, three days, one night. And this pattern of patience is not just the story of Nehemiah. It's the story of scripture. You see again and again, mistakes in the Old Testament that were made. Choices, decisions that were made that led to disasters and even new limbs on family trees because people got ahead of God's plans. They tried to take things into their own hands. You have stories in the Old Testament of children being born that were not a part of what God was doing and blessing because man had taken things into their own hands. The story of Jesus Christ is a picture of patience. You read in the gospels, you open it up and you're met with genealogies that stretch over thousands of years. Sin in the garden of Eden and thousands of years passed before the Messiah arrives on the scene to make the sacrifice for our sin. When you close your Bible in the Old Testament in Malachi, 400 years pass before John the Baptist arrives on the scene speaking. You have Jesus who's 30 years old before his public ministry starts. You have Jesus spending 40 days in the wilderness, praying and fasting. You have him taking all night prayer meetings before he made decisions about his disciples. He was even blamed for dereliction of duty, or not showing up, not doing what he was supposed to do. Remember the story of Mary and Martha and Lazarus, and Lazarus dies and Jesus waits four days and he gets there and Mary and Martha both said, "If you had been here." In other words, Jesus, if you hadn't just waited so long, this would be different. Jesus himself dies on the cross, and what's the deal with three days in a tomb? I mean, why not the next morning? He appears and he's visible for 40 days. I'm thinking, I've come from heaven. I've lived on this earth. I've died for sin. I've defeated the grave. I've risen. Let's head on back to heaven. But for 40 days he walks around on this earth, and where are we today? We're living under the promise of Jesus that one day He'll return.

It's been 2000 years.

I say all of this to just say that there is a powerful principle of patience and waiting on God to do what God is planning to do. There's a pattern of patients. I want you to notice also that in this story there's the fruit of patience. Why wait? Jesus waited those four days with Lazarus and we saw some things happen because he waited four days. What is the fruit of patience there? I believe, at least for these we could identify, one would be clarity of the vision. Nehemiah spent four months praying, fasting, mourning, he goes before the King and in those four months what we learned by his response to the King at just the right moment was it was in those four months where his passion came to life and his plans came together. And when the King said to him, what's wrong? He said, my family's lying in ruins in their city. And he said, what is your request? And he takes a deep breath prayer and he said, I need to go. I need timber, I need safe passage. I need letters. I'm going now. I'll be back then and I need to go. And that didn't just happen overnight. It was in that time of patience and waiting that God clarified the vision of what had to happen. In fact, he puts it into words in Nehemiah chapter two verse 12, listen to it, read it again, "Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me I told no one what God had put into my heart." When had God put that into his heart? It was in those four months, that waiting time, that time of patience, where he in those days and suffering days, hurting days, where it came to him, what he would ask, what he would need, and what he would do. And right now in your waiting time of trying to see things rebuilt, just look, wait, watch. God will begin to put in your heart what you need to ask, what you need to make it happen, what you need to do when the time is right. In patience, there is the clarity of the vision.

Secondly, there is calmness of the spirit. When you read through Nehemiah with all these events, what jumps off the page to me is how calm Nehemiah is. He is weeping, he is mourning. He is waiting and serving the King and when the King speaks to him, he was afraid but he was not rattled. And he knew immediately when the King asked what was going on to pray and ask God for help and then he unloaded what was in his heart, what God had put there. His faith had grown in those four months. His trust had grown in those four months and God had put it in him to trust him. And one of the things that happens when we have to wait is that it allows us to calm down. We can relax a little bit in the waiting for God to work. A verse that has guided my life since the first months of pastoring. 1992, fall of '92, God took me to Proverbs 16:32 and the first part of that verse has been a life-guiding verse for me, and it's this, "Better a patient man than a warrior." Better patient man than a warrior. And we know that the temptation for us is to want to grab things and make things happen, but patience produces clarity and calmness and, number three, patients produces continuance, a continuance of the work.

As we have these periods of waiting in our life, what it does is it lays brick upon brick of resolve and perseverance. And when we've waited, praying before the Lord for him to work, he steals our convictions. He steals our commitment. The King wanted to know how long Nehemiah would be gone. It turns out that in this story, even though the walls were built in 52 days, he was governor of Jerusalem for 12 years. In Nehemiah chapter five, just jumping over a little bit, it says in Nehemiah five verse 14, "Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the 20th year to the 32nd year of Artaxerxes the King, 12 years, neither I nor my brothers ate the food allowance of the governor. The former governors who were before me laid heavy burdens on the people and took from them their daily ration of 40 shekels of silver. Even their servants lorded it over the people. But I did not do so because of the fear of God. I also persevered in the work on this wall and we acquired no land and all my servants were gathered there for the work." And I hear that word

persevere, and one of the things that's happening in our waiting time, where we're attempted to be impatient, is that God is working in our life to build this spirit of continuance, of perseverance, so that in the valleys we trust him. In the mountain peaks, we trust him. When we can see clearly what's ahead, we trust him and when it's really vague and foggy, we don't know what to do next, we trust him. When we face opposition like Nehemiah faced, when we face things that are longer than we thought they would be, we're able to have this commitment that's built into us by being patient on the front end of continuance. It was forged in his waiting time.

Fourth, the fruit of patience is the character of the soul. Character of the soul. Nehemiah demonstrated this pattern of patience. Character was built in him. It came out in his reactions. You notice in Nehemiah when he was before the King, he had gone days without being sad in the presence of the King. Why is that? Out of respect for the King. Out of respect of his job, out of respect of authority. He showed integrity in his work and when it came time that the King did notice his sadness, his first response to the King was, now King may you live forever. You know why that is? Because Nehemiah thought there was a chance he was not going to. For him to be sad in the presence of the King would create an atmosphere that the King and Queen did not want. It was a risk of his life. But he respected the King, he respected the authority of the King. This was a pagan King. This was a King that had shut down the rebuilding of the walls prior to this. But Nehemiah's character came through and brick upon brick, the character traits of Nehemiah are put together. Listen to Romans chapter five, Romans chapter five verse three through five says this, "Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings." We rejoice in our sufferings. Some of you grew up on King James version. You know that when the fruit of the spirit are given to us in Galatians five, one of those as we read it in the ESV is patience. And in the King James version, how was that translated? One of the fruit of the spirit was identified as kind of a two word. What was it? Long-suffering.

Long, long suffering. We miss some of that in the word patience. Just saying the word gives you a little bit of the definition. Fruit of the spirit is long suffering, and that is often the moods you will experience when things around you are broken. You will feel like you're suffering, and you're hurting, and it's hard. What does God do with that? "Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings knowing that suffering produces endurance." That's that continuance, perseverance we're talking about. "That suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." Character is built over times of suffering, over times of waiting, over times of forbearance. Who we are is built and it comes out. How many times have we heard somebody say about a house 50 years old, 60 years old, 80 years old, you're walking through it and you're looking around the ceiling and the floor and you go, "Wow, this house has so much character." What are we saying? We're saying somebody took the time in this old house to do some things that are really special and unique.

It's rare for us to say about a 150 home subdivision built in 150 days, "Wow. This house has a lot of character." We're wondering if it's going to hold up in the storm. There's some of you in here today that would look at your life and say, "Wow, that old man has got a lot of character." "That old church has a lot of character." "That family has a lot of character." "That teenager has a lot of character." And the reason is that this practice of patience and waiting on God has allowed some special and unique things to be built into your life. And we call that character.

When we were building this building and new space, I know we talked about it for years. We had our Men's Conference yesterday and Friday, and Ken Whitten's been a pastor for 30 years in Florida and he's 65 now and we pulled in the parking lot and he said, "So that building right there," he pointed at the life building student center, "How long were y'all in that building?" I said, 15 years. He said, "How long?" I said, "15 years." He said, "Before you built that building right there, you were in there for 15 years? That temporary building?" He said, "Y'all didn't get in a hurry to build, did you?"

No, we didn't. You go back over the last couple of years and the waiting time, the building time. Somewhere mid summer this past year I think the Lord just put the words to my pen and I was writing a weekly newsletter and I made this statement: we are building a building but God is building us. And that's been the story of this building. That's the story of character. You see, the walls of Jerusalem, they'll be torn down one day again. The gates will burn one day again. These buildings are all going to burn one day. They're going to all crumble one day. What's going to last forever is the souls of men and women. We may build a building, but in the midst of that, God's doing something special and unique to build us.

So what I do while I'm waiting? What do I do while I'm patient? There are three things. There's worship. We need to be worshipful while we're waiting. You may not know anything else to do except just praise God for who he is. We need to be watchful for the right opportunities. There's going come a day where God says, "Speak, answer, go, move." And we need to be willing when it's time. And that was shown in Nehemiah's life. He wasn't procrastinating, he wasn't putting things off. He was worshipping, he was watchful and he was willing.

I mentioned Pastor Ken earlier. I'd never met Ken face to face before. I've observed him from a distance for over 30 years. For eight years, he was a college pastor for Dr Adrian Rogers at Bellview Baptist in Memphis, Tennessee. When I was in seminary, we all heard, "Hey, Ken Whitten, the college pastor at Bellview is leaving to go to Idlewild in Florida. And we were just amazed, we thought of Adrian Rogers, Bellview, we didn't think anybody left Bellview. But he left and went to Idlewild, and that was over 30 years ago. Pastor Ken came here and he did this Men's Conference. But actually this weekend there were two conferences. When it came together for Ken to be here and knew that he was going to need transportation from the airport here and then back to the airport, I raised my hand right up. I got that, I got that. And so the two conferences this weekend was the Men's Conference and the car conference. Carlos in the car, that's what it was. And I picked him up at the airport during work traffic on Friday afternoon, two hours in the car and then snow yesterday on the way back to the airport, a couple of hours in the car. And I'm driving and I'm asking questions and I'm listening and he's talking. I got the gift of both conferences this weekend.

Early in on that trip, he said, "What are you preaching now?" "I'm preaching through Nehemiah." Now listen, I'm about to say some things. You may have not written anything down yet this morning, but you're going to want to write some of this down. I said, "I'm preaching Nehemiah. I'm talking about waiting on God and being patient with God and rebuilding things." And then it was just like, I'm driving, Ken's talking." And he's sitting in the seat beside him and he's like, "Carlos," And I'm like, how am I gonna write this down? He said, "Listen, Carlos, you grow radishes in 60 days. You grow Oak trees in 60 years. Who wants radishes?" I'm thinking, I've got to pull this thing over. I mean, I got to write this down.

He said, "My grandfather, great grandfather, they'd miss a stage coach and wait three weeks for the next one to come through. We miss one section of a revolving door and we freak out." I

got back in the car later and I said, "Ken, what's that thing you said about stage coach? I gotta get that down." We're headed to the airport, and he said, "So waiting on God." "Yes sir. Yes sir. Talking about waiting on God." He said, "Isaiah 30:18, you know, it says that God waits. God waits to be gracious to his children." He said, "Do you know why God waits?" No sir. "He waits, he says he waits to be gracious to his children. God waits to dispense grace. God waits to develop growth, and God waits to display glory." That'll preach. He got out at the airport, I rolled the back window down. He opened the door. He reached in and grabbed a suitcase, he looked up at me and he goes, "Dispenses grace, develops growth, and displays his glory. Had a great time." And he was gone.

This morning at 7:08 AM I got a text from Ken Whitten. "Hey brother, praying for you this morning." He's about to preach to 6,000 people two times, "Praying for you this morning. When it comes to waiting, remember, God leads but the devil shoves. Love you, Pastor Ken." And then another text. "When it comes to God, time is not important. Timing is." See, the question comes down for us of whether or not in rebuilding things, do we want to take things into our own hands or do we want to be patient and let things be in his good hands?

Let's pray. As the band is coming and they're going to lead us in a song that gives us a chance to declare our work while we wait. Some of you this morning are in this place where you know what needs to be rebuilt and I want to invite you to come and pray because you cannot separate patience from praying. You cannot separate godly patience from praying. And this morning in the waiting, you need to be worshiping. You need to be praying. I would invite you to come and kneel across the front of this room and pray for what God is doing in the waiting time, the patient time, and the trusting time of rebuilding. Some of you need to trust Christ as Lord and Savior. Jesus has been patient with you, but today he says, today is the day of salvation. I want you to come and meet me here at the front and let me lead you in a prayer where you could call on Jesus to be saved today. Maybe you want somebody to pray with you, come here and meet me and let's pray together. Lets stand to our feet and you come right now. Lord Jesus, we thank you for your patience with us. Help us to follow that in our life as you rebuild. God, we celebrate, we declare that you are powerfully working while we patiently wait. We love you. We need you right now. We declare our praise to you in the name of Jesus. We're praying. Amen. Come right now. Pray. Seek the Lord.