

## **Worthy of our All**

Nehemiah 5:14-19, 6:15-16, 7:1-73

SERIES “Next”

### **Jarrett Stephens**

I’ve mentioned before that I have in my office a file box that is filled with articles, and service programs, and newsletters, and old school picture directories (those have been REALLY fun to go through!)

Some of you that have been around for while have received a text or two of pictures of you from the late 80’s or early 90’s that I’ve sent to you with a “who is this?” question/exclamation point following it! I have loved going through it!

Here it is right here, and it’s just filled with the history of this church. The files are marked by years starting in 1968-69, when it was just a dream in the heart of a few people and goes all the way up to 2018 covering our last major initiative that some of you were here for called, *Multiply*.

I have said several times in this message series what we are attempting to do with NEXT is called “NEXT” for a reason because the desire to expand...to reach more people...to do something great for the glory of God is NOT new to Champion Forest, it’s just what’s NEXT for Champion Forest.

I have pulled some of the previous campaigns we’ve done:

- This is from 1976 – it’s called, “Together We Build” – the church needed 12 new rows of pews to increase seating capacity by 21%. They needed a 14,000 square foot building that would serve much like the expansion we are pushing for at the North Klein campus – they needed more life group/Sunday School space amongst other things – “Together We Build” (Frank Dartez)
- Here is one from 1981 – it’s called, “Building Together by Faith” – there’s a theme in all this isn’t there? Building...and building together! It too is pushing for expansion and enlargement, and the goal was a brand-new worship center at the Greenwood Forest location. They had long outgrown the small chapel that had been built there about a decade before and the 12 new rows to increase seating capacity was already again overflowing. (Bob Jester, Gene Birdwell, Lee Harn, Gary Aylor, Craig Reynolds)
- This is the 1993 one – it’s called, “A Church on the Move”. This was the campaign to build on this site we are currently on. The master plan included this worship center that we are currently in...to include state of the art “rear projection and video screens”. The first phase included the family life center where Champion Forest worshipped for years before building this building we are in today. (Names on inside front)

- We'll do one more! This is from 2008 – it's called, "Impact: For Every Generation" – and the goal of this campaign was to do some upgrades to the existing building, build the new children's building, the new student building, the commons space out here that connected the buildings, did some parking lot expansion – this was a 40-million-dollar expansion!

And Champion Forest, in ALL of these campaigns and generosity initiatives through the years, you have stepped up and committed to do what the church sensed God leading it to do.

This week...I've got to tell you...it's been a week where my heart has just been FULL of gratitude for the faith of this church...and just for the spirit of this church.

I've gotten phone calls, texts, emails...been to lunch with people...gone into stores where members of this church worked and at EVERY point, the people I have crossed paths with or talked to has been so encouraging about today...excited about what God is going to do today.

It's been amazing...so uplifting.

And today, as we come to the day we've been praying for and anticipating – "Commitment Sunday" ...I want to bring a message, I'm calling: **Worthy of our All**

We've been making our way through the book of Nehemiah, and I want us to look at several verses from three different chapters in our time together. As I always like to say, if you have missed any of these messages, make sure to go back online and check them out...they build on one another, and it will help you better understand context and what's going on as we make our way through this book.

Nehemiah has returned to Jerusalem to help rebuild the city. For 100 years it has lied in desolation and God put it in Nehemiah's heart to go back and lead in the rebuilding effort.

He has the blessing of the king of the Persian Empire that ruled during that time, and as he goes back, he finds a people defeated. The temple has been rebuilt but it's a shell of its former glory. The walls have been in disrepair and so the city has no security...no protection from outside forces that would seek to do it harm.

Nehemiah is MOST upset and sees in all of this that the reputation of God is at stake, and so he returns to the city, rallies the people to the cause! As we saw last week, he has some opposition that he ignores at times and other times rebukes...he deals with some inward conflict going on, but one thing is certain in the mind and heart of Nehemiah - the projects are NOT going to stop.

Now, the major point that we are going to look at via the passages of scripture we're highlighting this morning is this...and it fits just PERFECT for where we are as a church today. I'll put it on the screen for you:

**What makes sacrifice significant is the motive behind it**

Sacrifice is the theme of the message today. God really is “worthy of our all”. Let’s look at the scripture together.

**Neh. 5:14-19 – “Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes the king, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the food allowance of the governor. <sup>15</sup> The former governors who were before me laid heavy burdens on the people and took from them for their daily ration forty shekels of silver. Even their servants lorded it over the people. But I did not do so, because of the fear of God. <sup>16</sup> I also persevered in the work on this wall and we acquired no land, and all my servants were gathered there for the work. <sup>17</sup> Moreover, there were at my table 150 men, Jews and officials, besides those who came to us from the nations that were around us. <sup>18</sup> Now what was prepared at my expense for each day was one ox and six choice sheep and birds, and every ten days all kinds of wine in abundance. Yet for all this I did not demand the food allowance of the governor, because the service was too heavy on this people. <sup>19</sup> Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people.”**

Here we see the personal sacrifice of Nehemiah. As governor he had the right to tax the people. Like his predecessors, he could have taxed them for forty shekels of silver – part of the daily ration assigned to the governor, but he didn’t do that!

He didn’t lay heavy burdens on the people...and take from the people...fill his own pockets at the expense of the people.

INSTEAD, he worked alongside them – always leading by example AND out of his own pocket (v. 17-18) – “what was prepared at my expense”, he fed 150 people a day! And he did this for twelve years!

Listen...this wasn’t cheap! It was a sacrifice. Over twelve years! That over 4,000 oxen...over 26,000 sheep to feed people that he brought in to be around his table.

Nehemiah didn’t exploit or take advantage of his people...he sacrificed and served his people. And as a result, the work of God (which Nehemiah put ahead of everything – including his own personal interests) – it moved forward.

So much so...that despite the outward opposition and inward conflict that we looked at last week that was going on...the work of God in rebuilding the wall – get this...it had been destroyed for a century, but because of the sacrifice of Nehemiah and the people, it was rebuilt in just 52 days.

**Neh. 6:15-16 – “So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul (August to October), 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 (their pride was crushed...they realized they weren’t all that...Israel’s God was still alive and FOR them...and the enemies), for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.”**

I LOVE this! At the completion of the project, no one was talking about how good Nehemiah and Israel was...they were talking about God!

May this be true for us, Champion Forest...that at the end of this project, no one should be talking about us, but because of the work that is accomplished THROUGH us, EVERYONE is talking about our great God!

What a feat! What an accomplishment FOR the glory of God! The wall rebuilt in just 52 days! That's TWO months! I remind you Nehemiah prayed for FOUR months before he even asked permission of the king to go back and be a part of rebuilding the walls!

What's the point? The point is we can do MORE with God in a moment than we can in a lifetime of striving on our own!

Let's make sure for our lives and our church, whatever we are attempting to do FOR his glory...whatever we're attempting to go after is saturated in prayer so that we have his help in accomplishing whatever it is we're being called to do!

It was clear, to Nehemiah and to Israel AND to the enemies of Nehemiah and Israel – 52 days...it was CLEAR, “this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.” – and this “help” all started in prayer.

So, Nehemiah sacrifices...the people sacrifice. This is what chapter 7 is all about. We're not going to read it all...it's essentially a genealogy. It's a genealogy that is nearly the same as the one given in Ezra 2 – it's the names of people that had returned to Jerusalem during the very first return of the exiles.

You know when the first Persian king – Cyrus, allowed people to go back to Jerusalem after being exiled for nearly 100 years, only about 2% of the people (according to scholars) returned...most simply stayed where they had built homes and lives.

Scripture gives the names and families of those who returned TWICE (Ezra 2 and here!)– it's a way of honoring what they did! Returning to Jerusalem took some faith...talk about sacrifice!

- They didn't know what awaited them in Jerusalem...
- They had built lives in Babylon and now they are uprooting their families to return “home” NOT even knowing what home looked like. It would have been much easier to stay where they were – they had already assimilated into the culture...
- They had to travel the 800-1000 miles back, mostly on foot...would they even survive the attempt to return...

BUT...they went by faith...and they sacrificed. Look at:

**Neh. 7:70-72 – “Now some of the heads of fathers' houses gave to the work. The governor gave to the treasury 1,000 darics of gold, 50 basins, 30 priests' garments and 500 minas of**

**silver.<sup>71</sup> And some of the heads of fathers' houses gave into the treasury of the work 20,000 darics of gold and 2,200 minas of silver.<sup>72</sup> And what the rest of the people gave was 20,000 darics of gold, 2,000 minas of silver, and 67 priests' garments.”**

These people were poor for the most part...didn't have much of anything. And yet TOGETHER – and we saw this in Nehemiah 3 (30x) – “next to” and “next to” – TOGETHER all these people who had relatively little...they worked...they gave...they sacrificed for the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

The “darics of gold, the minas of silver, the priest's garments” here in (v. 72-73) - scholars estimate that to be worth around \$5 million dollars.

It was a tremendous sacrifice the people made, and like credits in a movie – no one often watches them once the movie is over – but it's a way of giving honor to whom honor is due...they made the movie!

Well, in this case...these people...their faith and sacrifice made the rebuilding possible.

Commentator, **Warren Weirsbe** – “**The important thing is not to count the people but to realize these people counted.**”

Amazing. Nehemiah and the people knew that God and what he had called them to was “worthy of their all” – and so they sacrificed.

Now, go back to the main point I mentioned earlier. What we said is:

### **What makes sacrifice significant is the motive behind it**

See, it's NOT sacrifice in and of itself that's important. We can sacrifice, and it NOT be an act of worship. We can sacrifice and it NOT be pleasing to God! This is the history of Israel!

How many times do we read it in the Bible? God isn't impressed with our sacrifice if our heart isn't his! Just listen to:

**Isaiah 1:11-17 – “What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. <sup>12</sup> “When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? <sup>13</sup> Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations—I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. <sup>14</sup> Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. <sup>15</sup> When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. <sup>16</sup> Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, <sup>17</sup> learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.”**

David said it this way – “God isn’t looking for your sacrifice, he’s looking for a broken and humble heart” (Ps. 51:16-17). Micah said the same - what does God require? Not offerings. Justice, kindness, and humility before him (Micah 6:6-8).

Jesus, in Matt 5, said if you’re bringing a gift to the altar and remember that your brother has something against you – go make it right, then bring your gift! Paul said, we can give away everything, but if we don’t love, we’ve gained nothing!

Sacrifice VOID of the right motive is empty...it’s vain! It’s NOT an act of worship.

### **What makes sacrifice significant is the motive behind it**

And as we read the book of Nehemiah, we see TWO major motives that fueled their sacrifice.

#### **1. The glory of God**

Trace this work back to the beginning. The emphasis for how it started and what kept them going was the glory of God!

- Neh. 2:8 – “God’s good hand was upon me”
- Neh. 2:12 – “God had put it in my heart to do this”
- Neh. 2:20 – “The God of heaven will make us prosper”
- Neh. 4:15 – “God frustrated the enemies plans”
- Neh. 4:20 – “God will fight for us”
- Neh. 6:16 – “This was accomplished with the help of our God”

The glory of God – it’s why he wanted to rebuild the walls...the city of God was a reproach which reflected negatively on the reputation of God, and Nehemiah wasn’t having it!

Time after time, he rallied the people to remember WHY they were doing a great work, it was for God! THAT’S what made their sacrifice significant. It was the motive behind it – they wanted the glory of God!

There was a second motive that made their sacrifice significant...and that was:

#### **2. The good of people**

At every turn, Nehemiah had the good of people in his mind. It’s why he refused to exploit them or take advantage of them. It’s why in Neh. 3, he had them work in family units. It’s why he gave them a sword and a trowel and put watchmen in certain places – it was all for the good of the people.

It's why the people rallied to build the wall no matter how tough it was and how tired they got...talk about sacrifice. We learned last week (4:23) – they didn't change their clothes or put their weapons down.

Why? Because they needed this wall...they needed to complete this project for the sake of their own safety and protection. They were working together...looking out for one another...and their names are listed TWICE in scripture because of their sacrifice and commitment to the work of God.

What made their sacrifice significant was their motive behind it. The glory of God and the good of people is what fueled their sacrifice and motivated them to accomplish what seemed impossible.

Sacrifice.

**Illus. 1976 brochure** – In this brochure from the capital campaign in 1976, our founding pastor, Robin Guess writes:

**To the Generous Fellowship of Believers:** (they were trying to raise \$400,000 in this campaign “Together We Build”)

**Once again, we are called upon to “rise up and build.”** (He's quoting Nehemiah!) ...  
**“Together We Build.” It's one of the most exciting ventures we've ever launched. It will be the most demanding challenge we've ever undertaken...**

**That's why sacrifice is the key to success. Our total contributions may vary according to wages earned. One hundred dollars to one person may equal ten thousand dollars to another. However, equal sacrifice will do the job. I offer no apology for going after all of it! All of us will reach a new spiritual peak in our lives as we give with equal sacrifice.**

**Rejoicing with a big hallelujah!**

**Robin Guess**

Equal sacrifice.

I told you; my heart has been full this week, hearing from different people both inside and outside our church...I've heard amazing stories of sacrifice.

- A child baking cookies and selling them to give to our NEXT initiative...
- A man who by his own admission, doesn't have much, but the Lord woke him up twice in the middle of the night to give all of his retirement – it was a collection of silver that he has accumulated over the years. He came into my office this week, shared what the Lord had spoken to him in his heart and gave it all! Estimates it to be somewhere around 30-40K.

- Two people...that are not even members of our church. Reached out to me this week and said, “We feel the Lord us leading us to be a part of NEXT steps of Champion Forest. We believe in you and the church to do what God has called you to do. We are both going to give 100k now and 75K for the next two years. So, committing to 250k each for a total of 500K for the three-year project!” Not even members of our church!
- Pastor Ramon messaged me yesterday. A man from our Spanish community...he’s an engineer. He’s here on a work visa and with changes in our immigration policy, he doesn’t know if he will be able to stay. They are going through all the proper channels but may have to leave the country. He wrote Pastor Ramon saying, “despite the uncertainty his faith remains firm.” Since arriving at Champion Forest, the church has deeply impacted his life and his family. He said, “I don’t know what will happen or where I will be, but I give in faith because just as the church has been a blessing to me and my family, it will be a blessing to others who do not yet know Jesus.”

All kinds of gifts from all kinds of people who have said “yes” to the Lord, and taken their place on the wall to help with this project – not equal gifts, but equal sacrifice – ALL for the glory of God and the good of people.

Listen: A thousand years from now...a million years from now, NONE of what we are sacrificing towards from a PHYSICAL standpoint will be here...but the impact of our sacrifice and what we are doing in this moment, will last forever in the lives of the people who receive Christ and grow as a disciple.

Champion Forest, for the glory of God and the good of people, let’s add to our history today. And let’s stretch...and let’s go by faith...and let’s sacrifice...because HE and HIS Kingdom is “worthy of our all”.

Will you pray with me?

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*Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.*