

Rubbish

By Paris Reidhead*

Nehemiah, Chapter 4. I might say that I had no intention of bringing a series of messages from Nehemiah when we began, but I have had great delight and joy in reading and meditating upon this chapter, and I felt led of the Lord to share with you that which it has spoken to my heart. And so I begin reading with the 1st verse of the 4th chapter, the Book of Nehemiah.

“But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews. And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned? Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall. Hear, O our God; for we are despised: and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity: And cover not their iniquity, and let not their sin be blotted out from before thee: for they have provoked thee to anger before the builders. So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work. But it came to pass, that when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth, And conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it. Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them. And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall. And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease.”

My theme this morning, as the bulletin announced is “RUBBISH,” and my text is the latter part of the 10th verse, “...and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall.”

Many score years before the time of which Nehemiah writes, Nebuchadnezzar had laid siege against Jerusalem, and had destroyed the walls. Now, he was thorough. There were many other cities that he destroyed, also, and archeologists can always tell when they come on the rubble of one of Nebuchadnezzar’s victories. It was so thorough. Nothing of value was left. Everything that was not confiscated was broken. And, digging as they have, they have been able to check and say as they would put a well down into the ground. This is where Nebuchadnezzar laid siege. This was the kind of a city that Jerusalem was when Ezra came and rebuilt the Temple. Now the Temple speaks to us of reestablished worship, and fellowship with God. You understand, of course, that there is no real testimony for God, nor is there any glory for God unless worship is reestablished. All service that has any value must flow out of worship.

We are amazed at times to discover that we can say, without really thinking, We are saved to serve. And this is not correct, because the Scripture makes it clear that “God is Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in truth;” (Joh. 4:24) and it declares, “God seeketh such to worship Him” (Joh. 4:23b). And all service that has any value must flow out of worship. And, therefore, there must be a building of the Temple before there can be any effective service for the Lord. But we discover that Ezra’s generation were appalled by the task overwhelmed by the odds, discouraged by the difficulties, and thought that they could stay within the Temple and thus please God. But you recall how that Hanani had come to Shushan where Nehemiah was and told him that, though the Temple had been erected and worship was resumed, God still had no testimony. There were no walls. The gates were burned, and they could go in and out within being stopped or hindered or discouraged, or made afraid. And so Nehemiah’s heart became greatly burdened, the Temple was there, but there was still no testimony. Those faithful ones had retired within and had forgotten that God is greatly burdened about others. He said to Abraham, “In thee and in thy seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 22:18). And again He said by our Lord Jesus to the church on the mount of ascension, “After that the Holy Ghost is come upon you” (Act. 1:8). This is personal worship, and vital relationship with the Lord. You are the temple of the Holy Ghost. “After that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, ye shall be witnesses unto Me.” And the outflow of worship is always witness. This, Israel had not.

And so we find that Nehemiah was used of God to join his work with that of Ezra in order that God could get the glory that He wanted. Now these things are written for our learning. And though there is nothing in the Scripture that identifies this as a

type, I feel perfectly free in taking it as an analogy and as an illustration. Therefore, when my text states, There is much rubbish so that we are not able to build the wall, I feel that there is an illustration here of a deep vital, spiritual truth, that is so clearly given that perhaps by this means, and none other, we can bring into focus the task of the people of God in seeking to secure a testimony for God in the middle of the 20th century.

Now you will recall that when our Lord Jesus came He made it perfectly clear that that which He was doing had no relationship to Israel other than that He was the fulfillment of the pictures, the types and the shadows, that had been lost by Israel's blindness. And so, as our Lord began to build His church, He had to deal with the rubbish of Phariseeism. The whole of the Sermon on the Mount was given by our Lord, I believe, to delineate the difference between that which the Lord was doing and that which the Jews knew, that which Judaism had. He was doing this in order that He could establish the complete otherness, the total difference between this that He was bringing and that with which the people were familiar.

You recall that He said in Matthew 16 verse 18, "Upon this rock I will build My church." And immediately Peter understood what He meant; The fact that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God was now to become the foundation; and Peter and James and John were prepared to go out and use their organizational skill, their talent, and their techniques in order that they could give to the Lord the weapons that He needed to accomplish the task of Messiah, which was to give back to Israel the glory that she had. So even with His disciples, these that He called to Himself, that spent three years with Him, to whom He spoke most clearly and distinctly, and frequently, yet on the day when our Lord was walking toward Emmaus, you recall that one of them still spoke from Pharisaical blindness, We thought that it had been He that would have restored the kingdom to Israel. We were confident that He had come for that purpose. Even though He had told them repeatedly that He had nothing to do whatever with that with which they were familiar. (See Luk. 24:13-35) The Pharisees, of course, stumbled at this stumbling stone, as did Peter. For when our Lord said, "Upon this rock I will build My church;" and said then, "He must go into Jerusalem and suffer, and be killed, and be raised the third day, Peter said, Be it far from Thee, Lord" (Mat. 16:21-22a).

He was not going to let the Lord build the way He had purposed to build. Now from Pharisaical tradition, Peter was going to instruct the Lord in a Biblical architecture, and in church polity. But our Lord turned upon him, and said to Peter and to any that would come after and take away anything from what He had established, "Get thee behind me, Satan" (Mat. 16:23a). And I believe, by inference, He was saying that throughout the centuries to come there would be a satanic effort to change the complete distinction between that which had been and that which the Lord Jesus brought. Then He fixed it, "If any come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and come follow Me" (Mat. 16:24).

To become a convert to Judaism, one had to deny his idolatry. Yes. One had to deny his nationality. Yes. One had to deny his name and take a new Israelitish name. One had to be circumcised and baptized, and become a proselyte. Oh there was a way for the Gentiles, for heathen to get into Judaism, but our Lord said, In His new thing it would not be like that at all. They would have to be born, not of the man, not of the will of flesh, not of blood, but of God. There would have to be a supernatural impartation of life; God would have to perform a miracle if anyone was to have any part in the church that He was building. And so our Lord had to contend with the rubbish of Phariseeism, as He would build the church. For all those who came to Him were trying to drag along, trailer loads of Pharisaical rubbish, and synagogue-itis, and all the other putrefying diseases that had corrupted to the place where our Lord had to just write Ichabod over it all. The Pharisees themselves stumbled and could not come. He said of them, "The traditions of the elders have made the Word of God of none effect" (Mar. 7:13). They did not go to the Word to find out what God said. Whenever an issue was raised, they went to their favorite Rabbi to find out what he said about God's Word. It was not to let God's Word speak authoritatively. They had to have someone else, over and above and beyond the Word, And then again, He said, "Ye search the Scriptures, for ye think that in them ye have eternal life" (Joh. 5:39). And our Lord made it clear that eternal life is not in the Scripture, but it is in Himself. "He that hath the Son hath life" (I Joh. 5:12). And I believe, therefore, that we cannot understand the church beginning without seeing the rubbish that was there, from the ruins of man's efforts to improve on the simple, plain truth of God.

You understand, of course, that there was not only the original rubbish, but there also was the rubbish which came into the church as it passed on through the decades and the centuries. And I would like to suggest to you some of the rubbish that had

been accumulated outside the walls of the church when you came into it, for we are all seeing the church visible in some respect today.

First, may I make it perfectly clear that we know that the foundation is laid, already laid. No “other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (I Cor. 3:11). So today we may have problems and difficulties, but the Foundation of the walls are there. They have been set deep. They have been set firm. And we need not tremble there. This is not the issue in the present time, for we know that. We have the Word. And I believe on these foundational, fundamental truths as to what God’s Word establishes there is very little question in the evangelical community. But then, the moment that you go above the surface is when you find the residue of invaders.

For you will discover, after just a little while in studying the Word, that there has been tremendous rubbish accumulated from pagan philosophers. If you should wish to use the time, and I can suggest far more profitable ways of using that time than this, but if you should wish to use the time to read the philosophers going back to those who proceeded Socrates, and Socrates, and Plato and others, you would be amazed to discover when you had come to the Pauline Epistles how many of the old pagan ideas had invaded the church. Reading the epistle to the Colossians, for instance, you find that Gnosticism, this dualistic system that said, “Matter is bad, spirit is good,” (Satan’s lie to get himself whitewashed, if you please), had already come into the church and somewhere recently I mentioned how that down South, I heard a speaker address a young people’s conference from that text, “Touch not, taste not, handle not,” the three-fold instructions to young people in the 20th century. And I was appalled by it, because the text actually says, “and they that shall perish with the using” (Col. 2:22).

This was Gnosticism. This was the old pagan idea that matter is bad, spirit is good. And it had crept in like Nebuchadnezzar’s armies and battered down the truth of the Church that God created matter and that it was not bad in itself, in its essence, but it was the use to which it was put that gave it a moral quality. And the consequence of it, therefore, was that Gnosticism, and then its later little grandchild, Manichaeism, when the Persian by the name of Mani had taken the Gnosticism of the pagans and given it words much in the same way that some of the cultists have taken the truths of the Word and given other ideas. And so we find that there was this invasion early.

And then later on we discover across the centuries that humanism has invaded. And humanism is that teaching that the chief end of all being is the happiness of man; related to religion it is from a liberal point of view, “The chief end of religion is to make man happy while he is alive,” because liberalism theologically has no heaven nor hell, nor any answer to the fears of death. But it does say this, “Well, if you come to church, let us read to you poetry, and give you platitudes. We’ll make life a little happier for you while you are alive. We have no answer to the dilemma of life, or to the enigma of it, nor to the dark portal through which you are called to go, but at least we exist to make man happy.” This is humanism.

And then, in a fundamental context, it would turn out like this, “The chief end of fundamental religion is to make man happy when he dies.” And so we find that even today this pagan idea that the chief end of being is the happiness of man has crept into the church, and if you will read and listen you will discover that much evangelical preaching is basically not Christian, not theocentric, but it is humanistic, making God a means instead of the glorious end that He is. And people are so undiscerning as not to see it, and not to recognize that this is the rubbish that is there. It is not a wall at all. It is rubbish that has been pushed in by the bulldozers of pagan philosophers that took the garments of the church without taking Christ.

We find that today it has come to a type of hedonism, that pleasure is the end of being, and that the highest morality that anyone can achieve is the ultimate that exploration and satisfaction of their appetites for pleasure. And so, today, outside of the church, in the world around us, we would have to conclude that most of the people we see are hedonists, living just for pleasure, living just to satisfy themselves, and please themselves, and amuse themselves, and this now has become the whole end of being.

And so, we find that the church has been invaded through the centuries by these things. I cannot possibly pass this concept of rubbish in the church as you came into it, without reminding you that for a thousand years the church was submerged under the rubbish of Romanism, and Romanism was a combination of Manichaeism and Hinduism, and many of the other oriental religions that had come into the Mediterranean basin at the time of the 3rd and 4th centuries. So we find that Romanism then

was the whole answer to the church. It seemingly was though we know that parallel to Rome there were those rebels who refused to the yoke of tyranny and were hated. You can go back to the Montanists, and the Albigenses, and the Waldenses, and the Anabaptists, and find a continuous strain of blood all across the centuries of those who refused to submit to Rome. But essentially Christendom as it was known was under this rubbish of Rome.

Occasionally, you would find some man like Savonarola¹, Francis of Assisi², Meister Eckhart³, Julian of Norwich⁴, some of these others that would rise up and burrow through the rubbish and stand there with a testimony that blessed all who have heard or read it. But basically Christianity was covered with rubbish.

Then we remember that Luther⁵ and the reformers broke with that, just as Nehemiah broke with Jerusalem that had nothing but rubbish instead of a testimony. The difficulty, of course, was that Luther did not live long enough. He did valiantly while he was alive, but as soon as he died his followers said, "He has gone as far as there is to go." And so since that time we have had another accumulation of rubbish around the walls of the church, and that is the rubbish of denominationalism, until today we have 312 denominations that are listed with the government, and we have many church groups of one or two churches or three or four churches, or even one church, so that a recent author has said, "Let's take the number of the man of sin and call it "666" denomination." Well whether it be that many more or less is beside the point, but we still know this, that whenever you come into the church, you come into a group. Every church is part of a group, and every Christian sooner or later becomes part of a church, and so he becomes part of the group.

It was Robert Finley⁶ of International Students that stood here a few years ago and told of his experience up in Chungking in the heart of China. He saw a man and he surmised him to be a Christian, and went to him and said, "Are you a Christian?" And the man stood straighter and said, "Am I a Christian? I would have you know that I am a Lutheran of the Missouri Synod." Well then Mr. Finley said, "Pray tell, what has the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran church got to do out in Chungking when there is a war on?" But this somehow has been part of the rubbish with which we have carried the Gospel, until almost, almost everywhere we have gone we have been building the testimony and spreading the rubbish outside of the walls. Somehow it behooves us, therefore, to recognize that when we came into the church, when God, by His grace and power, put us into Christ this is what we had, just as when Nehemiah came to Jerusalem the walls were there.

But what is the answer to this? I believe that God in His grace, by one means or another, is going to get a testimony, just as by one means or another the walls were built around Jerusalem. And out of all of this rubbish that we have seen, someday God is going to use circumstances and men in His Sovereign, supernatural power, and e'er the Lord comes He is going to get a testimony for Himself. He may have to do it by the alchemy of war, He may have to do it by the capture of all Christendom, by ecumenical powers. I do not know. But I know this, that God is vitally interested in getting something that is wholly His own, totally His, a wall up around the Temple, so that His testimony to His grandeur, and His glory, His majesty can be seen, and I believe that you and I have some little part in this.

But remember, when you came into the church there was not only rubbish in the church but you brought some along with you. We must not forget this, the rubbish from which you came, and even brought with you. If you would care to turn to Psalm 40 and the 1st verse, I think you would find that there is one before us that had the candor and the honesty to recognize this, and because of his recognition he was in a place where God could do something for him; "I waited patiently for the Lord," said David, "and He inclined unto me and heard my cry" (Psa. 40:1). And then notice what he said, "He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings" (Psa. 40:2).

Never forget this, dear heart. It behooves all of us to remember the pit from which we have been dug. It behooves all of us to remember that when we came we came as every other sinner has ever come, standing naked, and empty, and broken, and

¹ Girolamo Savonarola (1452-1498) An Italian Dominican Friar

² Francis of Assisi (1181-1182) An Italian Catholic Friar

³ Eckhart von Hochheim (1260-1327) A German Theologian, Philosopher and Mystic

⁴ Julian of Norwich (1342-1416) Mystic

⁵ Martin Luther (1483-1546) German monk, former Catholic priest, who wrote the Ninety-Five Theses.

⁶ Robert Finley (1922-)

helpless with nothing to bring Him but a mountain of guilt, and a heart filled with corruption and uncleanness. This is how you came to Christ. This is how everyone else has come to Him; He has never made another door. No one can go in through the 2nd story, and no one can come in lower, through a basement entrance. Everyone that comes in, comes in through the door, comes in a self-confessed sinner, comes in hopeless, comes in helpless, comes in broken, and comes in as one in the miry clay sinking, with none to deliver. Such were you, such was I. And take anyone, however fine their apparel may be, out of the miry clay, and out of the filthy pit, and, they are all bedaubed with the dirt of their own sin. And so, consequently, it behooves none of us to think of ourselves any other than David thought of himself as he says, "He brought me up out of a horrible pit, and out of the miry clay."

But I would also have you see something else. You were in willing bondage. It was not a pit into which you were forced and being held. You did not have to be chained there. You were there and I was there because we liked the pit. We could swim in it. It was our natural habitat. We were content there until something happened to awaken us to realize there was something better. Oh, let us never think that we were chained in that pit. We were there swimming in it, just as the child disobeys and goes into the forbidden pool, so it was with us. We were as corrupted by, in bondage to the eye and the ear, and the heart and the mind, and the memory all clogged with the rubbish that held us. What was it? We were held in the chains of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Now notice what David said. "He brought me up." That is why our Lord Jesus said, "I will build My church." "He set my feet." Oh, there are those that think they climbed out by their decision, or they somehow swam out by their prayers, but my friend if you ever got out of the miry clay and the filthy pit, God brought you out. You would have stayed there till you died in your doom if God had not brought you out. Let us never forget it, never lose sight of it. He brought me out. He set my feet. I did not do it. He did it. And if you are here today and you are a candidate for grace and mercy and God has done something in your life, never forget it. He did it. And He is going to build His church out of those that He has brought up out of the miry clay. And if you have been brought up by Him, you hate the pit. If He brought you out and set your feet on the solid rock, you hate the clay. And when I find someone that names the name of Christ, and is prepared to go back and swim in the pit, and jump in again and feel it as his natural habitat, all I can think of is "the dog returning to his vomit and the sow to her wallow" (II Pet. 2:22).

For there is nothing there that evidences that He brought them up, for when He does He gives a new heart, and a new nature, and a new Spirit, and a new life, and makes you a new creation. For He says, "I will build my church." And we have tried to build it. We have built it out of the products of our energy, and have about ruined it. But when He builds it, ah, it is a different matter.

So we find that the first thing that God does, when He brings you up out of the miry pit, is to make you hate rubbish. The attitudes, as well as the actions. It is not just the deeds you have done. It is the attitudes that produced deeds. It is the thoughts, it is the impulses, it is the emotions. And when God has given you a new heart, you discover that you hate these things as well as the words or the deeds. And you discover that you hate the motives as well as the emotions. You are not only prepared to say that you do not want to be that kind of a person any longer and do that kind of thing, but you want God to do something to your heart, and He does. Bless God, He does. And, therefore, if you have been made His Child, and He brought you up, and He has done something to you, you hate the rubbish, just as Nehemiah hated it, just as he despised it. For you find that the thing that stands in the way of God getting the walls built around your life...and, my dear, He says, Flee, flee uncleanness, flee iniquity, and flee sin, And just as Israel – the Jews, rather, trying to build the walls, saw the rubbish and realized that it was an impediment, a hindrance that their enemy could creep up through it and destroy them, so if you have been born of God you hate rubbish.

What is this rubbish? Oh, hear the Apostle Paul as he cries out, "Who shall deliver me from the bondage of this death?" (Rom. 7:24) Who shall deliver me from the rubbish that I have carried with me. Some might say, "Well Paul didn't know any answer," but he did have an answer, for he said, "I thank God through Jesus Christ my Lord" (Rom. 7:25). But he will have to recognize it as rubbish. You have to hate it as rubbish. You have to see it as rubbish standing in the way. You cannot make peace with it.

You cannot defend it. You cannot justify it. Rubbish it is. Rubbish it remains. Rubbish it will ever be. And God cannot get a testimony until we treat it as rubbish.

What is it? Pride. Personal pride. Family pride. National pride. Racial pride. And above all, spiritual pride. Oh, what rubbish. How it hinders! Have you declared war on it? Have you recognized that this is nothing but the walls that were broken down by the enemy, and when you see the rising of tide you see it as rubbish? Have you looked upon unbelief, the natural state of the sinner, and the natural atmosphere of the world, as rubbish? or have you somehow tried to rationalize it and justify it? Have you looked upon anger as the sin that it is, the rubbish of the old nature? For if you are in Him, then He is on the Throne, why need you be angry? Have you looked upon despondency and discouragement as rubbish? For if God is on the Throne and has committed Himself to love you and to love me, how can you ever fear what man can do to you? Have you looked upon self-exaltation, the exalting of oneself, eating ambition to get position and place as rubbish carried in from the old life? Have you seen it as such? Have you declared war upon it? Have you recognized that evil imagination and lusting of mind and heart is rubbish that stands in the way of God getting His walls built to His glory? Have you realized that old habits of thought and old habits of speech, old habits of action, of self-defense and self-vindication are all just rubbish?

Have you come to the fact that legal thoughts, legal acting, legal fears are all rubbish? Have you realized that you cannot? Have you come to the place where is not disciplining yourself alone? Oh, there is that, but not just that. There is something of the infusion of His power, and the pouring forth of Himself. Have you recognized that worldly associations and the communications that they bring are all just rubbish? How often it is that a child grows up in church and when he gets older and his heart lusts for the things of the world, and he looks back on his father's religion and says, It's rubbish. He never met the Lord. But oh when you have met the Lord Jesus, and you have come to Him, and you come into His church, you look back upon the world, and you say, Rubbish. Standing in the way. Have you done that?

You say, Yes I have done that. I have done it. But what am I going to do? How can I keep from being held down, and bound and defeated by the rubbish that I brought with me? Is there any answer? And I say to you this morning, Bless God, there is an answer. There is an answer, but it first has to be this. Paul speaking of this very same conflict said, "The things I counted gain to me, I count lost to Christ; yea doubtless, and I count all things but ...as rubbish, refuse, no value, that I might win Christ, and be found in Him, not having my righteousness, ...but His" (Php. 3:7-9). Oh, if you will come to the place where you will recognize that everything that is not of Christ is rubbish, everything that is not for Him is rubbish, everything that is not by Him and to His glory is rubbish. Then there is hope. And then we can come with Paul and say, I see me. "In my flesh dwelleth no good thing" (Rom. 7:18). But I see Christ, and I see myself crucified with Him, and buried with Him, and quickened with Him and raised with Him, and seated with Him.

Oh, see it this morning. Rubbish. See it is you. For when He went outside to the cross, He took His place on that Cross, He went to the place of offscouring, He went to the refuse heap, He went to the place where rubbish was carried. Can you see that? Can you recognize that? Can you realize that? Can you see and understand that He is asking you to go outside the camp, bearing His reproach, and bearing your cross, and come to that place where you and I together shall as long as we live realize that the only way we can get victory over the rubbish of the world is to come to that place in union with Christ in death, "crucified with Him," where it is "nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20). There is victory over rubbish. It need not stand in the way of building the wall of testimony in your life, but it will unless you will treat it for what it is. But oh how glad I am that He set the way. Follow those blood prints on the soil, and you will come to the place where He was raised in your place upon a gibbet, a cross, and when He died, you died that we might be saved from tyranny of rubbish.

Shall we pray.

Look deep into our hearts this morning, our Father. We sit before Thee in eternity bound company of men and women and young people. We will never be quite as we are this moment. Some it may be the warmest closest moment; to some it may be the time when they are most sensitive to Thy Spirit's speaking voice. Oh God of grace, that Thou in Thy sweet love would be pleased to stretch forth Thy hand and save some among us today. And then that Thou in Thy great grace wouldst reach down, and some that have been covered cumbered, hidden there in the rubbish of the past, O God, that Thou wouldst cause us to

see what it is, and to hate it for what it is, and turn from it as for what it is, and come out to that place where our Lord Jesus died as us. And then, Lord, we pray. Oh, we pray as Thou hast bid us pray for the peace of Jerusalem, so we pray for the purity of the church. Somehow save it from all the rubbish that has been thrust upon it, and in these last days, get glory to Thyself through the church and make us part of it. For Jesus' sake. Amen

Let us stand for the benediction. "Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost be and abide with each of us now and until Jesus come again. Amen" (II Cor. 13:14).

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