

## HOPE GIVERS: PT 4. REBUILDERS OF CITIES

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3rpCFJg9bIY>

This is an inspiring story of what God is up to in NZ. Across the country churches are awakening to their role in blessing the city. And for the church of the city to be a blessing to the city, it must be a united church.

### Rebuilders of cities. Isaiah 61:4

Isaiah begins by prophesying destruction on Jerusalem and depending on how you date the book, later parts were written when Jerusalem had been destroyed. There are 4 Old Testament books that deal with the restoration of Jerusalem.

Ezra (the story of restoration of the temple),  
Haggai and Zechariah (prophets during temple restoration),  
Nehemiah (the story of rebuilding the wall around the city).

In 586 BC, a little less than 400 years after Solomon erected the First Temple in Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian empire destroyed the city of Jerusalem, and carried a small remnant of Jews into captivity in Babylon. Seventy years and the Babylonians had been taken over by the Persians, with Cyrus as king. He issued an order sending some of the Jews back from Babylon to their homeland and gave them resources to build the temple.

The book of Ezra recounts the story of this first wave returning from exile to rebuild the temple. Almost another seventy years after the first wave, Nehemiah led another contingency of Jewish exiles from Babylon back to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall around the city. He joined Ezra, the high priest in working to restore the safety and boundaries of Jerusalem by rebuilding its wall.

So these words do prophetically link to this history. So how does this relate to us. Well remember these passages are kingdom passages, pointing forward to Jesus Christ's coming, and the coming kingdom.

Isaiah starts the book with prophesying the destruction of Jerusalem. But then comes these promises of a messiah and a rebuilding. But by Ch 65 we have pictures of a new kingdom coming and that a day is coming when creation will be restored back to its original design. In the second last chapter God shares a vision of a restored Jerusalem, as a model of what a restored city with like. Isaiah 65:17-25

### From this we can see 4 markers of a healthy city

Healthy community, physical health, vibrant neighbourhoods, sustainable living  
Enjoyed and rewarding work  
Safe community  
Unhindered communion with God.

3 out of 4 of these can be embraced by people of any faith .

### How does the church fit with this?

Nehemiah and Ezra present a great model for where the church and city leadership fit together. Nehemiah rebuilt the walls with the support of Ezra. Walls represent the physical well being of the city. First 3 points Ezra rebuilt the temple. Represent the church community, with the active support of Nehemiah. The church and pastors can't lead city transformation. But it can actively support it by helping people understand God's heart for the city, and by empowering people. We need Ezra leaders but we also need Nehemiahs: men and women of faith who see their calling is far greater than just coming to church on Sunday. It is interesting to note the king Artaxerxes is not a believer at all, but he provides the resources to rebuild the walls. And King Cyrus is not a believer and yet empowers the building of the temple.

Sometimes people today think the church should separate itself from the government and the world, so that it can maintain its purity. God's use of the pagan king to build His temple and restore His city's walls should show us that the government can and should have a major role to play in the transformation of our cities. The goals of the church and the goals of greater society can actually be aligned. The prophet Jeremiah spells this out very clearly to the exiles as they were going into Babylon (a pagan city): Jeremiah 29:7 - .

When the foundation of the new temple was built, the Lord purposefully called attention to the fact that the new temple would be a "shadow" of the former temple. Haggai 2:3 And the survivors grieved at the sight. Two verses later, however, God declares to the leaders and the people to "Work, for I am with you. My Spirit remains in your midst." Interestingly, He then goes on to declare that there will be yet another temple and it will make Solomon's temple look like a shadow. That Temple is the church.

There is a very powerful message here. There is a pervading belief that the work of city transformation is not worth the effort or the energy, because God will eventually destroy our current reality and replace it with His perfect reality. Therefore, the best we can hope for is to "save" as many people as possible in this current state. The result of this mindset is a church that recedes back into its own walls in order to protect itself from the evils of the world. In contrast, the words of God to the people of Israel in this instance were very clear: Work, for I am with you (in your work).

The other part of the argument is that the work itself is not spiritual. Here we see God very clearly declare that His Spirit will be in their midst as they work on the "shadow" temple, which ironically would be the very temple in which Jesus himself would enter on Palm Sunday almost 600 years later.



## The role of the church in rebuilding

To be a united body in the city. No single church can influence a city. But the church of the city has profound resources to be able to influence a city. The church of the city is the biggest volunteer agency in the city, with influence in every sector of society. And yet the church is seen as fragmented, stuck in little silos, each doing their own thing. Jesus very last prayer was that his body would be united. This is one of the reasons I am committed to building unity. But the other reason is that it is only as we are united that we can actually be an influence for good.

## Families rebuilding neighbourhoods

The model in Nehemiah was the families worked together to rebuild the walls in their neighbourhood. And strong healthy families are a key to seeing a city transformed as well. God has placed you in your school and neighbourhood to be a giver of hope. To be salt and light.

Southwest Baptist church in Christchurch has built neighbourhood networks over the city with groups of believers who look for ways to build good community. Some are based around schools where they serve. Some are based around just a local focus where they join the local gym and shop locally and build networks of relationships, do street parties and just find ways to bless communities.

Your family can actively help bring transformation to neighbourhoods by being a good neighbour and finding ways to influence your community.

**Persistent prayer for the city.** Our prayers are often focussed on ourselves and the church. But what if God were just as interested in the well being of the city. Scripture constantly affirms God's heart for the city. Jesus weeps over the city. Paul ministered into cities. God says to Jonah of his compassion for Nineveh. What if we were begin to pray for the well being of our city. Homelessness, violence, unemployment, broken families. Prisons.

## Serving the poor alongside those with similar goals

We can't meet all the practical needs of the city's well being. Often the church has tried to do it alone as individual congregations and without engaging with others. But what if the church were to partner with others with similar goals for the city, and work alongside others. That is what we are doing when we work with the trust at Bushy point. Our goals align and so when we partner with them we achieve far more than if we try to do it on our own. What if we could strategically build other partnerships. We have an active partnership with No 10 across the road, collaborate, dream of a joint street party. We Work with Jubilee with firewood. Church is to serve the poor.

**Equipping believers in the workplace** Jerusalem was rebuilt as the Nehemiahs were empowered to see that what they did was God's work. As a church for too long we have said that ministry happens in the church. But what if actually

your ministry is the place where you work. What if the role of the church is to equip you to be salt and light in your work place? What if you began to ask. What would my workplace look like if God were to rule there.

This year, we plan on Sept 12 to have a Sunday of service. This might well be in the middle of our building development. We will meet for breakfast, then go out, and serve the city as our act of worship. There will be clean and green projects like last year, maybe a free car wash just to bless people, and we will be looking for other projects that we can do to serve schools and kindies and other agencies. I hope we might be able to involve some other churches in this as well. (some are not too keen on doing it on a Sunday). You also might wonder why we are doing it on a Sunday. Clearly signal that serving is part of our DNA. It is to say that worship is far more than just about singing songs. Need your help for projects.

God's calling our our lives, and as a church is to be part of his plan for this city. The place where God has called you. Part of his plan to rebuild the cities that the enemy has wrecked havoc on. As a church, one of our goals is to seek the welfare of the city. So as you are part of this church, you are part of this as well.

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[www.icbc.org.nz](http://www.icbc.org.nz)

## REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

- What is your reaction to this call to be rebuilders of cities?
- How does the idea of being a city rebuild challenge your theology?
- How has the enemy destroyed cities? Discuss the markers of a healthy city.
- How could your family be an influence for good in your neighbourhood? Are their others from church who you could collaborate with ?
- What aspects of your work place culture do not line up kingdom values. How could you be an influence in that place to bring change?
- Brainstorm on ideas or who you could approach about projects for a Sunday of service. How do you feel about doing this on a Sunday?



**CENTRAL BAPTIST**

LOVE GOD : LOVE OTHERS