

# BUILDING 4 GENERATIONS TO COME

## Eyes on the Prize!

Nehemiah 2:17-18

INTRODUCTION: What do folks in Puerto Rico, Mexico City, SE Texas, South Florida, all have in common with us this morning?

**We all need the message God sent through Nehemiah**, the Governor of the Persian Province of Judea.

We find it in Nehemiah 2:17-18.

You remember that Nehemiah had come to Jerusalem because of the leadership of God in his life to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem that had been destroyed more than 160 years earlier.

When Nehemiah arrived in the ancient city, he toured the broken down walls at night. The next day, he addressed the citizens.

**Nehemiah 2:17 ... "You see the distress that we *are* in, how Jerusalem *lies* waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach."**

He did not ask them to go with him to take another tour of the destroyed walls. They knew what they were like. They lived there. Most of them had seen them their entire lives. That may be why they had not done anything about it. They were accustomed to it.

But **Nehemiah gave them a new vision**.

**Nehemiah shared with them God's vision.** God did not want it to remain as it was.

Nehemiah was saying to them, **KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE PRIZE**

He was saying the walls do not have to remain like they are. They can be built again. God is calling us to do it, and He will empower us to do it,

### **I. WHAT IS THE PRIZE GOD IS CALLING US TO WORK TOWARD?**

**A. Millennials and Generation Z becoming disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.**

B. Church, let me show you something.

- I'm just going to show you this with Millennials because most of Generation Z just left for Kid Zone Live or they are in the Preschool right now.

- Millennials, I need your help.
- Everybody in the worship center from 17 to 35, would you please stand?
- Stay standing. We are going to count you.
- Count is \_\_\_\_\_ (Put # in phone calculator)
- Millennials, thank you. You may sit down.
- Folks, assuming an average attendance today, if we had as many Millennials as we have other age groups by percentage, do you know how many would be in worship with us this morning?
- **143**
- We have \_\_\_\_\_ (divide # by 143). That's \_\_\_\_ % of what we should have!
- The prize God wants us to see is 143 millennials, and more as the church grows, active in our ministries and growing as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Folks as we make a decision tonight whether we are willing to make the changes that are necessary to reach and disciple these two generations, let's focus on the prize!
  - Let's not focus on the changes
  - As much as we focus on what is to be gained in the Kingdom of God,
  - What is to be gained for eternity!

Keeping **eyes on the prize** reminds me of when Karen and I went to pastor my first church.

#### C. Skelly Drive Baptist Church –

- Was averaging 160 in attendance, and
- Was in its tenth straight year of decline when we arrived.
- Those who were left were a sweet bunch of people who loved the Lord and believed God still had much to do through that church.
- I was 28. Quickly you are figuring Karen's age. Some of you are thinking she must have been 3 years old because she looks a good 25 years younger than me. Well, you won't get me to tell you any different!

- We were young. I was fresh out of seminary, and we did not really know what to do to turn the church around.
- But we caught the vision God had given the people. They didn't get the vision from us; we got it from them. They saw that God wanted a re-vitalized church that would minister to its community and would be a place where those around us could come to know the Lord and grow as disciples. They saw the prize, and they were willing to do whatever God would enable them to do to attain it. They helped us see the prize, and together we set out to work for it.

Folks, let me tell you, I was not the first one to notice the missing millennials from our midst nor to see the prize God has set before us to reach and disciple them.

- I wish I had seen it first!
- I would love to have been the one to first see God's prize for us.
- But I wasn't.
- In fact I had to be convinced.
- But when I saw the simple facts that I have shown you and explained to you that we simply are not reaching and discipling nearly as many millennials as we ought to be,
- Knowing God's command for us to make disciples
- I saw the prize! And since that time, I have kept my eyes fixed upon it.
- I shall continue to work for it until I die or you run me out of here, because my eyes are on the prize!

Fellow members at St. Andrew, if you have not seen the prize yet of St. Andrew Baptist Church 10 years from now,

- Not being a church that is dying because it has no young or median adults to help carry the load of leadership and ministry,
- But the prize of still being 10 years, 20 years from now, if the Lord tarries, a 4 Generation Church with hundreds of young adults, hundreds of median adults, and hundreds of older adults, all growing and serving the Lord and Bay County together.
- If you have not yet caught glimpse of that prize, open the eyes of your heart and let God show you the prize this morning.

For those of you who are not a part of our church family

- If you live nearby, we hope one day you will be part of our family of faith.
- But if you live elsewhere and we are just blessed for a single day or a few weeks to have you with us, understand this message is also for you.
- Whatever it is God has called you to do, whatever work, mission, or ministry, the Lord has given you, **KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE PRIZE!**

And in fact, the Lord spoke an additional word through Nehemiah.

**Nehemiah 2:18 And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king's words that he had spoken to me. So they said, "Let us rise up and build." Then they set their hands to *this good work*.**

Nehemiah told them about how God had already been faithful to prosper the work, ever since the day Nehemiah caught sight of the prize and committed himself to work toward it.

- He told them how God had sent him from the service and palace of the king to Jerusalem.
- How God had the king elevate him from cupbearer to governor of Judah
- How God had provided timber for the repair and reconstruction

He was telling them, listen people, just

## **II. TRUST GOD AND KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE PRIZE.**

- A. That is all Karen and I did at our first church.

1. As pastor, pastor's wife, and people, we began to work toward the prize, the prize of a healthy, growing neighborhood church serving its community.
2. We decided to work on the growing part first.
  - We only had a few young couples in our church, and almost no children.
  - We would go into the kids' classes on Sunday morning and there would be only 2 or 3 children in every class.
  - We would have young families visit, but they would often tell us that they wanted classes for their children to have more children for them to play and learn with.
  - It was a catch 22. We couldn't reach families with children because we didn't have enough children.
  - We had prayed about this, and we were talking one day, and Karen said, "We need a bus ministry." We had both worked bus ministry during college and knew we could pick up neighborhood children and bring them to church. I agreed. The church already had an old bus, so we decided to start a bus ministry.
  - All we needed was somebody to do the bus ministry, some couple who would visit and enlist kids on Sat. morning, and then pick them up before church, and take them home after church.
  - Only no one would. Asked and asked, and couldn't find a soul.
  - But our eyes were on the prize. We knew this would help us toward the prize.
3. So we decided we would do it.
  - Now, by this time, we had our own two toddlers: Jeremy and Kyle – 10 months a part! They were together so much that one day when a lady asked the younger one what his name was he said, "Kyle and Jeremy."
  - Now if I tell you this next part, you have to promise you won't retroactively charge me with child abuse or something.
  - Every Sat. morning, Karen and I took our two little boys by the hand, and we went out into the neighborhood enlisting other children to ride our bus to church. The Lord helped us find plenty.
  - On Sat. night, we bathed our little ones, put them in a night diaper and put their church clothes on them and put them to bed.

- On Sun. morning, we changed their diapers, picked up donuts for the kids on the bus, fed one to our own kids on the bus, and our family did bus ministry.
  - After church, we loaded them all up and took them home, parked the bus at our house until church at night, and back we went.
  - And God gave us about 40 children to add to our children's classes.
  - And young families would visit, and the children's classes would just be comfortably full, and a good number of them joined our church. And our church doubled, nearly tripled over the next eight years.
4. We didn't do anything great or spectacular.
  5. We just trusted the Lord and kept our eyes on the prize.
  6. Now, there's more to the story, especially about ministering to the community, but I'll tell you that another day. It's a story about circus tents and a camel, but we don't have time today.

CONCLUSION: Stand and bow in prayer.

Oh, dear friend, whatever it is that God has put on your plate and led you to do, quit worrying, don't fret, don't take up complaining.

Trust the Lord, and keep your eyes on the prize.

What God wants you to do He will equip you to do, enable you to do, give you the power to do.

Just trust Him, keep your eyes on the prize.

Dear member of St. Andrew, would you tell the Lord today you will do just that. Would you put your eyes on the prize of reaching and discipling these younger generations?

Would you tell God you won't worry about your own desires and preferences or whatever doing His will might cost you.

**Would you tell the Lord, "My eyes are on the prize, and I trust You!"**