

## **The Story: Chapter 21 The Final Three**

Tell the story:

This is the end of “Movement Two” of The Story.

### **Five Movements of The Story:**

#### **Movement 1: The Story of **Creation** (Genesis 1 – 11)**

In the Upper Story, God created the lower Story. His vision is to come down and be with us in a beautiful garden. The first two people reject God’s vision and are escorted from paradise. Their decision introduces sin into the human race and keeps us from community with God. At this moment God gives a promise and launches a plan to get us back. The rest of the Bible is God’s story of how He kept that promise and made it possible for us to enter a loving relationship with Him.

#### **Movement 2: The Story of **Israel** (Genesis 12 – Malachi)**

God builds a brand new nation called Israel. Through this nation, He will reveal his presence, power, and plan to get us back. Every story of Israel will point to the first coming of Jesus – the One Who will provide the way back to God.

**Next week we move to the third section in The Story:**

#### **Movement 3: The Story of **Jesus** (Matthew – John)**

#### **Movement 4: The Story of the **Church** (Acts – Jude)**

#### **Movement 5: The Story of the **New Garden** (Revelation)**

At this point...

The people of God have moved back into Jerusalem.

- They have rebuilt the Temple, with a little help and encouragement from the Prophet Haggai.
- After they had built the Temple they began to wander away from God again.
- In Ezra chapter 7, the Prophet Ezra makes his way to Jerusalem. In about 458 BC.
- Then, Nehemiah arrived in about 445BC.

- Then came Malachi, at about this same time.

All three of these prophets brought different messages to the people of Israel living in Jerusalem.

- And, I think we can learn a great deal from each of them today.

I understand...

This message is supposed to be about...

- Building the church
- Giving the Tithe
- Completing Phase 2...
- Or whatever!

But, here's the real picture. Our goal in Rome is not the remodeling of this building.

- It's not putting a new finish on things and trying to make them look better.
- Our goal for our city is bigger than that.

So, I want us to look at this passage with that goal in mind.

The real goal for us as a body in Rome Ga:

To see **life changing revival** throughout our community, including a move of God in our Churches, in our Christians, and in the lives of non-believers.

We want to see the **Kingdom of God** fall on this place!

- Culture Change
- Marriage Restored
- God's rule

But, just like rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem, **there are some things we must do**. And we can learn those things directly from these prophets of the Old Testament.

**1. We must deal with our sin first.**

Ezra 7 is where Ezra makes it from Persia back to Jerusalem.

- With the help of King Artaxerxes and the grace and favor of God.

As soon as he gets settled in he begins to hear of the evil practices of the Israelites:

### **Ezra 9:1-2**

**9** After these things had been done, the leaders came to me and said, "The people of Israel, including the priests and the Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the neighboring peoples with their detestable practices, like those of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians and Amorites. <sup>2</sup> They have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, and have mingled the holy race with the peoples around them. And the leaders and officials have led the way in this unfaithfulness."

Ezra was a prophet that was all about making sure the Law of God was understood and followed completely.

- That's why God put him there at that time.

He understood that God's people could not move forward with anymore building until they removed the sin from their lives.

### **Ezra 10:10-12**

<sup>10</sup> Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, "You have been unfaithful; you have married foreign women, adding to Israel's guilt. <sup>11</sup> Now make confession to the Lord, the God of your fathers, and do his will. Separate yourselves from the peoples around you and from your foreign wives." <sup>12</sup> The whole assembly responded with a loud voice: "You are right! We must do as you say."

**Here's the truth for us today:**

- Any change that we will bring to our community starts right here with us first.

### **Matthew 7:5**

...take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

We can't accept sin in our lives and then expect something different from our city!

## 2. We must get to know the **needs** in our community.

Look what Nehemiah did when he first got to town:

### **Nehemiah 2:11-15**

<sup>11</sup> I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days <sup>12</sup> I set out during the night with a few men. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on. <sup>13</sup> By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire. <sup>14</sup> Then I moved on toward the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was not enough room for my mount to get through; <sup>15</sup> so I went up the valley by night, examining the wall.

He knew that he had to see what was really going on in the city, and with the wall, before he started trying to lead the people to follow God.

As we plan and strategize about how to see our city changed for the Kingdom of God, we must understand where we stand right now.

Most of us cannot name the members of our City or County Commissioners.

- We don't know who is on either of the School Boards.
- We may not even know the principal of our own kid's school.

Do we know what the biggest sin issues are in our city?  
What are the strongholds that are keeping us from making great progress for God?

We can't even begin to **pray effectively** until we know the real needs of our city.

We have a drug problem in our city.  
We have too many divisions in our city.  
We have way too much competition in our city, even between churches.

Three areas of stronghold that we must see broken down in Rome:

Religion

Race

Relationships

### 3. We must be about doing **God's work.**

#### **Nehemiah 2:17-18**

<sup>17</sup> Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." <sup>18</sup> I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me. They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work.

They understood that a city without walls was not safe from any enemy.

- This was a critical need in their city that they had let slide for way too long.

How about here in Rome?

How can we actively be about the work of God in our city?

- We must love people as our brothers and sisters.

**EX:** Will Gravelly talking to Pastors about people being our brothers!

- We've got to shine the Light of Jesus in places where we don't even want to.

- We've got to have conversations with people that we don't know and that look nothing like us.

### 4. We must build **through** the opposition.

#### **Nehemiah 4:11-14**

<sup>11</sup> Also our enemies said, "Before they know it or see us, we will be right there among them and will kill them and put an end to the work."

<sup>12</sup> Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, "Wherever you turn, they will attack us." <sup>13</sup> Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families, with their swords, spears and bows. <sup>14</sup> After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, **and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.**"

**Nehemiah:** the workers would be working with one hand and holding the sword with the other.

A lot of people in our city don't want to change.

- They don't want things to get better.
- They are totally fine with the junk they're living in right now.

**Loving and helping people is not as popular as you might think!**

**5. We must finish strong.**

Malachi comes along to point out that they have once again turned their backs on God.

- They are marrying the wrong people.
- They're sacrificing blind and crippled animals when God ask for the best they have to offer.
- They are robbing God by not giving their tithes and offerings to the church.

**Malachi 1:10**

<sup>10</sup> "Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar!"

Then, in the last few verses he reminds people to get back to the Law of Moses.

- They must live according to what they have already heard from God in the Law of Moses.

Challenge for us: When we decide to jump into this battle for the souls in our community, we CANNOT QUIT!!

We must...

- We must deal with our own sin and raise our level of holiness.
- We must get to know our own city in order to make a difference.
- We must be about doing God's work.
- We must build in the midst of crazy opposition.

AND... we must finish the work we've started.

And then we remember...

### **Hebrews 12:1-2**

...let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

<sup>2</sup> Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith,

Because we also know...

### **Isaiah 40:30-31**

<sup>30</sup> Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall;

<sup>31</sup> but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Good news for us: NEXT WEEK Jesus comes on the scene.

The news that follows that whole story is that ONE DAY, Jesus is going to come again.

- We only have from today until THAT day to see the Kingdom of God grow in our city.

Are we going to be about the work of God until He comes??

- I sure hope so...