

Pattern for Mission in a Hostile World

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 03 April 2005

Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 0 0] Well, perhaps you would turn up with me the book of Nehemiah. We're going to be referring to it in several places this morning. It'll be a help if you have the text open before you.

Well, this morning I want to think about a pattern for mission in a hostile world. Following our annual meeting this week, we were looking forward and thinking about a vision for mission here together in St. George's Tron as we think about the future.

And I want to, this morning, restate some of that and help us focus our minds upon this task that we share together as missionaries in Glasgow.

There are only really two questions that we need to ask concerning mission. That is, what is our task? In other words, have a vision for what our mission is. And secondly, how do we go about it?

That is, we need a pattern. And on Wednesday we talk quite a bit about our vision, what that means. But I want to, this morning, reiterate that, just so that we're absolutely clear.

[1 : 1 0] Because today there is an awful lot of waffle about discerning what God is saying to the church today. Have you heard people say that sort of thing? Discerning what God is saying to us, what God wants of us today.

I want to tell you that there's no need for us to do any such thing. Because God's saying the same thing to his church today as he's been saying to his church always, all through history.

What God is saying to his church and what he once and for all delivered to the saints, as Jude says in the New Testament, he tells us that our task is to build the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

It's very simple. And that means, according to Paul and the other apostles, according to his commands to Timothy, which are his commands for the church in every age after the apostles, that means essentially three things.

It means proclamation of the gospel, preach the word again and again, Paul says to Timothy. Why does he say that? Because the gospel is the power of God for salvation.

[2 : 1 2] It means preservation of the truth of the gospel. Guard the truth, Paul says again and again. Why? Well, you must guard the truth of the gospel or there'll be no gospel to preach.

And thirdly, he says you must do all of this despite persecution. Endure suffering, he says again and again. And that is something that we're beginning to see increasingly, even in our Western world, as our culture increasingly rejects the Lord Jesus Christ.

So we don't need to ask ourselves what our vision for mission is. It's very clearly set out for us in Scripture. All we need to ask ourselves is, well, where are we placed? What opportunities do we have to do these things?

What are our specific responsibilities under God for all of this? As I said on Wednesday night, I find it personally helpful to think about these things, these responsibilities just under two headings for us here in St. George's Tron.

First is that we're surrounded by unbelievers. Quite literally, here we are in the city centre. Hundreds and hundreds, thousands of people crossing our front door every week. We therefore must have great responsibilities, mustn't we?

[3 : 23] For evangelism, making Christ known in the city centre and throughout this city. Because you live all over the place in this city.

So we're surrounded by unbelievers. But secondly, we're surrounded, aren't we, by Christians, by believers. Especially by young people, young students all around us in the parish here.

People who need training and teaching. The whole wider church in our land is desperate, isn't it? For teachers, for evangelists, for church planters. These needs are clear and urgent.

We don't have to go searching for what God's saying to the church today. It's perfectly plain. And what we need is therefore to train and to teach.

And to push out teachers, evangelists, and church planters and pastors. We don't need to wait for some special sense of call for what our job's got to be here.

[4 : 19] It's as plain as the nose on your face if we're responding to scripture. And so that is our task. Building the kingdom of Christ. Building for God today. That means building for spiritual reformation of Christ's church.

And it means growing Christ's church right here in Glasgow and in Scotland and beyond. Very straightforward. But of course the reality is that we live in an increasingly hostile culture and society, don't we?

Our culture hates the message of Christ and of scripture. It's very interesting, isn't it? I don't know if you've been listening at all to the radio or the television in the comments about the death of the Pope.

They're very happy, the commentators and people from all kinds of spectrums. They're very happy to venerate the man and his charisma and his religion. But they're very vicious against some of the things where the Pope has stood out clearly on issues which are indeed biblical.

Matters of sexual morality. Things to do with abortion and so on. But they don't like that. We live in an increasingly hostile culture. And yet we've been called to build the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

[5 : 31] So how do we go about this? Well, I want to talk this morning about a pattern for mission. A pattern for building Christ's kingdom in the face of the kind of fierce opposition that we face today.

Paul says in Ephesians 6 that our opposition is not just the flesh, but it's the world, the flesh and the devil. And the book of Nehemiah is a very wonderful insight, isn't it, into exactly this thing.

It's not just a wonderful story, an exciting narrative, but it gives very graphic examples of exactly the same task that you and I are in today.

Not because it's about building walls and physical structures and so on. That's the whole point of the book. Nehemiah is a builder, but he's a builder for God. He's building the kingdom of Christ.

His whole task is to build the future of God's people and prepare for the coming of the Messiah. Takes them back to the land, builds the walls, makes them again a worshipping, covenanted people, so that the Christ could come.

[6 : 38] Well, our task is exactly the same. We're building the same kingdom. Not preparing for Christ's first coming, but we're very clearly preparing for the coming of our Lord Jesus in power and glory.

That's what we're doing. Nehemiah would have heartily endorsed Paul's word to the Ephesians in Ephesians 6.12. We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Therefore, he says, take up the full armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Well, we all know the story of Nehemiah, don't we?

He was cupbearer to the king, Artaxerxes in Persia, as we read. But he had a great vision for Jerusalem, for rebuilding the walls, which had previously been ruined. He had a great vision for taking on the task that Ezra had begun with the first return of the exiles.

So he goes to Jerusalem and he builds these walls. It's an extraordinary story amidst the most intense and ongoing opposition. But he reconstitutes Israel once again as a covenant people of God, distinct in their own land, distinct in the face of the pagan nations.

[7 : 57] It's a triumph of faith in the face of the most extraordinary opposition. If you read in the book of Daniel in chapters 9 and 10, Daniel sees visions in the spiritual realm that speak about what Nehemiah actually faces on earth.

Yes, Jerusalem would be rebuilt, he was told by the angel, but, quote, in times of trouble. The whole thing that he saw was described as a great war, many battles.

And of course, that's what the New Testament tells us we're engaged in today, isn't it? That's what Paul tells us again and again. We're fighting many battles. We're building the kingdom in the face of great spiritual opposition.

So what is the pattern for mission in the face of great spiritual opposition? That's a vital question for us as a congregation, isn't it? In everything we do, not just in physical building, and we were talking on Wednesday about a proposed building project to renovate this building, that we might realise our mission to the city centre here more effectively.

But it's very important in our whole task of building the kingdom of Christ in the place that God has set us here in Glasgow. We're at the heart of a city centre, at the heart of a city, at the heart of a nation.

[9 : 15] What's the pattern for a mission to be? Well, I want to put before you this morning four key principles that I think in Scripture always make up the pattern of truly biblical mission. And I think we see them illustrated very, very clearly in the book of Nehemiah.

The first one is very simple. Scripture. Scripture. The book of Nehemiah, as we've read, begins with the effect of Scripture on this man himself. Chapter 1 shows us a man whose mind and heart is shaped by Scripture.

His whole motivation is to do what God has said he has promised to do in his Scripture, in his Word. He wants to do with God what God has said he'll do through his people in his land.

Chapter 1, verse 5, he prays, O God who keeps his covenant. Verse 8, remember, he says, the word you gave to Moses. Nehemiah, you see, is led in all his thinking by what God has revealed in his Word.

We see it in chapter 8, when Nehemiah's very first priority, after the walls have been completed and the people are safe inside the city, his very first priority is to take the people right back to the Scriptures.

[10 : 31] Just look at chapter 8. It's a magnificent chapter. Here we have the entire people of God gathered. Chapter 8, verse 1, And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the water gate.

And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses so that the Lord had commanded. So Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly, both men and women, and all who could understand what they'd heard on the first day of the seventh month.

And he read from it, facing the square before the water gate, from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and all those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law.

And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose. Verse 5, Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people. He was above all the people and he opened it to the people.

And they stood. And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, Amen, Amen. Verse 8, They read from the book, from the book of the law, clearly.

[11 : 30] They gave the sense so that the people understood the reading. Here's Ezra reading the law, expounding the law, explaining the law, and others going and teaching that to others.

You see, it goes on, verse 13, Another day, on the second day, they did another day of the same thing. Went on and on. Look at verse 18. Day by day, from the first day to the last, he read from the book of the law of God.

Look at chapter 9, verse 3, They stood in their place and read from the book of the law of the Lord, the God, for quarter of the day. That's the 24th day of doing that. And you see, all the way through the book of Nehemiah, we find scripture is at the heart.

Scripture remains the bedrock of the whole Reformation that he effected. Both to correct them, to rebuke them, and to encourage them and to instruct them.

It's worth just noticing here that here is a people, an untaught people who did not know the scriptures. Who had been in exile in Babylon and Persia amid an alien culture, who were coming back now to a totally new culture that they'd never experienced.

[12 : 39] A pagan culture. A very post-modern culture. Different religions. Different cultures. All sorts of things around them. And so what was Nehemiah's strategy? Well, now that we've got the walls built, we're going to have a three-week course on post-modernism, he said.

We're going to sit down and learn about all these other people's religions. We're going to learn about modern culture. We're going to do all these things. Is that what he did? No. His strategy was, he built a pulpit for Ezra, and they spent day after day after day reading and explaining and prosecuting and understanding scripture.

Notice it was all the people. Did you notice that? Verse 3. The men and the women and all the children. All those who could understand. Very interesting study to look through the family services of the Bible.

You find they're not usually to do with conjurers bringing things out of hats or people dancing around like idiots. Actually, it's all about teaching children and adults scripture. All the people, all together.

Very reminiscent of Paul's epistles as Paul went around the ancient world. He wrote his letters, didn't he, to the churches. Lots of instructions there to children, too. Children, obey your parents.

[13 : 58] All God's people needing all God's word. Notice also, he didn't say, well now, of course, times have moved on since we left the land and culture's moved on and we're not in a very literate age now.

We're not in a word culture. We're in a visual culture. Look at all these pagans. They've got their fancy ceremonies. They've got their bright colours. They've got their dancing and all the rest of it. So, let's get rid of scripture. We're going to have videos. We're going to have a visual culture now.

No, he didn't say that. He built a pulpit. He taught the people scripture. Neither did he say, look, we can't take it anymore. People's attention spans have got very, very short.

People have got very ignorant. We've been away and they don't know the Bible. They've got no Bible background like they used to in the culture. We can't assume any knowledge. So, therefore, we've got to do less and have sound bites.

We can't take it. Nehemiah thought ignorance of the Bible means you must have a strategy of making people no longer ignorant of the Bible.

[15 : 00] It's quite straightforward, really. So, Nehemiah 8, you see, was the heart, the power of the great spiritual reformation that took place. That oughtn't to surprise us.

That's the pattern all through history, in the biblical history and in the post-biblical history of Christ's church. Think of the 16th century and the Reformation in Europe.

There was a continent utterly ignorant of scripture. They had the scripture not in their own language. It was locked up by the priests and it was covered around by endless religious accretion and tradition which utterly obscured the gospel.

People knew nothing about scripture. What was the strategy? Teach the word. Proclaim the truth. And that strategy is what set the whole of Europe ablaze.

Brought faith to light. And brought new life to the people of God. Why is that? It is because the Bible tells us the word of God is the power of God.

[16 : 05] And therefore the word of God at work is the power of God at work for salvation and for equipping God's people. Do you remember 2 Timothy 3, 15 and 16? About all scripture being God-breathed.

The purpose of these verses is not just to tell us that we should believe that. Not that we should believe the scriptures alone but that we should put the scriptures to work. Paul says these are the things that make you wise for salvation.

These are the scriptures that will equip you for every good work. It's the same all the way through the Old Testament and the New.

Scripture and its teaching must shape the church and its mission. In real life. In real life. Not just in theory.

Not just in the articles of what we believe. We've got no liberty to substitute anything else as the driving force of our mission. Scripture and its proclamation begins mission.

[17 : 03] It drives mission. It powers mission. Not tradition. Not a magisterium. Not charismatic personalities. Scripture. Nehemiah chapter 8 is a wonderful chapter that shows how God's word is at work among his people.

Read it this afternoon and ponder it. Just like Acts chapter 6. Where in the face of all kinds of threats to the early church. The apostle said the word of God and prayer must be central.

We must not be distracted. What was the result? We read the word of God continue to increase. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Scripture must be at the very center of our vision here in St. George's Tron. Not just in the car along for the ride. Not just in the passenger seat. In the driving seat.

Scripture is the first principle in any pattern for mission. The second is very related to it. And again very straightforward. Supplication. Prayer.

[18 : 09] Just as in Acts 6. It's utterly inseparable from Scripture. So we see it here in Nehemiah chapter 1. The whole book begins with Nehemiah's great prayer. Here he is pouring out his soul before the Lord in response to Scripture.

It goes on that way all through the book. In the face of terrible opposition. Look at chapter 4 verse 4. Hear O our God for we are despised. Turn back. Give their taunt upon their own heads.

And give them up to be plundered in a land where they are captives. Do not cover their guilt. Let not their sin be blotted out from your sight. For they have provoked you to anger in the presence of the builders.

Very, very like the prayer in Acts chapter 4. Where the apostles are gathered together and they pray this. Lord, look down on their threats. Grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness.

Chapter 9 has a remarkable example of corporate prayer. All the people together. All those who could understand. Young and old. Praying together.

[19 : 06] Turning to God. On the 24th day of the month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth. With earth on their heads. They separated themselves from all foreigners. And stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.

They stood up in their place and read from the book of the law of the Lord. And for a quarter of the day, for another quarter of it, they made confession and worshipped their God. Prayer.

First of all, seeking God and his kingdom. In other words, prayer for mission. That's familiar, isn't it? All the way through the New Testament we see the same thing.

Jesus. What does he say in the Lord's Prayer? What comes first? Your kingdom come. Prayer for mission. All the way through the Acts. All the way through the Epistles. Pray that the Word of God may go forth unstopped.

Why is there big emphasis on corporate prayer here in Nehemiah and in the New Testament? Praying together as God's people. Well, one is simply practical, isn't it? It's very hard to sustain on your own praying for a whole hour and a half for mission.

[20 : 11] Can you do that? I can't do that. But I can on a Wednesday night when we're all gathered together. I've got my brothers and sisters encouraging me. I can do it then. Can't do it very well on my own.

But there's a much more important reason. A theological reason. Here is God's family together. He has given us the privilege of sharing in his powerful mission to the world.

Read Revelation chapter 8 verses 1 to 5 when you go home and see the picture there of the prayers of the saints rising up to heaven and being hurled down upon the earth by the angel to affect God's plans and purpose.

It's something he calls his whole people, his body, to be involved with. That's why it's so vital for us. Prayer and the Word go together. Prayer and the Spirit are inseparable. The Spirit breathes out the Word, which is the power of God for salvation.

We must be a church at prayer. Congregationally, together, and in small groups and in triplets and individually and all these things. Not inward self-focused prayer.

[21 : 20] That's not the kind of prayer we see in the book of Nehemiah. We see upward and outward God-focused prayer. Kingdom-focused prayer. Praying in line with God's promises about his kingdom. That's what Nehemiah was doing.

You see, if the focus on Scripture reminds us that the Gospel is the instrument that builds God's kingdom, well, the focus on prayer reminds us that God's Spirit is the agent who builds God's kingdom.

It's not us, it's him. Prayer must be at the very center. Of our vision in St. George's Tron. Not just in theory.

That implies individuals must actually bodily be doing it too. Scripture, supplication. Third, strategy.

None of this means that we are to be passive. It's quite the reverse. You get some people who say, well, we must pray and God must do the work. We mustn't do anything. You get others who say, no, no, no, we must be people of action.

[22 : 24] Well, you're both wrong. Dick Lucas often says, the sign of God being at work is that men are at work. And that's true. Paul puts it this way in Colossians 1.29.

It's extraordinary. I struggle, struggle with all his energy that he powerfully works in me. I'm struggling, but it's his energy at work in me.

And that's so clear all the way through Nehemiah. Look at chapter 4, verse 9. We prayed to our God, he says, and set a guard. Verse 14.

Remember the Lord who is great and awesome. And fight. Or verse 20. Our God will fight for us, he says. But look at verse 18. The people each had a sword strapped to his side.

Verse 23. Weapons in his right hand. There's no conflict at all between God's sovereign work in building his kingdom, and evangelism, and mission, and our work, our calling to labor with all our might to that end, with all our ingenuity, with all our planning, with all our strategy.

[23 : 31] Look at Nehemiah himself in chapter 1. He's driven by scripture. He's moved to pray. Not just in general, but verse 11. He says, Answer the prayer I make today. For his particular plans in the face of the king.

Nehemiah, you see, he did seek God. He asked God to open doors. But when God did open the doors, well, he was ready. He had a strategy. The king said to him, Well, what do you want, Nehemiah?

He didn't say, Oh, well, I'll come back to you in a fortnight. I'll go away and pray about it. Not a chance. Verse 5. He knew exactly where he wanted to go. I want to go to Jerusalem. When do you want to go?

Verse 6. I know exactly when I want to go. How are you going to achieve it? Verse 7. I want letters of passage to get me through. How are you going to finance it and furnish this thing? Verse 8.

I'm going to have letters that will give me timber so that I can build. You see, he was ready when the door was opened because he was a man of prayer and of scripture. Not in spite of it.

[24 : 29] Because the Bible, you see, is not a book for academics. It's not a book to be poured over in dry, dusty libraries. That's not what it's about at all.

The Bible is the book through which God is at work. It's an action book. People of the word and prayer are people of action. Where God is at work, men and women are at work.

Nehemiah had a strategy. He had a biblical strategy. And he refused to be distracted from that strategy. I love chapter 6, verse 3, don't you?

I'm doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you? All these people wanted to have ecumenical conferences with him and say, let's all get together and do our work together.

People in the evangelical world are obsessed with that. Let's all have get-togethers and have get-together prayer meetings. Nehemiah says, look, we're doing a great work. Get on with your own work. I'm doing mine.

[25 : 29] God builds his kingdom through his people. People who have vision and strategy. Strategy that is driven by the gospel and the mission of the gospel. That's always the way and Nehemiah is a great example of it.

Just think about Paul. His travels in the Acts weren't just willy-nilly all over the place. No, he had strategy. He had plans. He had dreams.

He pushed open doors. He went to strategic population centers so as to evangelize whole countries. Acts chapter 19, we read that he stayed in Ephesus for two years preaching.

The result was, if he's preaching in that crucial city center, all the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord. He had strategy. He desired greatly to get to Rome, the hub of the ancient world.

Why? Because the gospel then would filter into all the ancient world. Last November, when I was at the Proclamation Trust Ministers Conference, I was hugely encouraged by Don Carson, who was preaching through the book of Nehemiah.

[26 : 39] And especially at this comment, he said something like this, just getting along to next Sunday's sermon isn't enough. The Reformation in Nehemiah's time was not just accomplished through Ezra the faithful priest expounding scripture.

No, it needed also the entrepreneurial spirit of Nehemiah who had vision, who saw what needed to be done and actually made it happen. You see, we need scripture, we need prayer, but we also need strategy.

It's not a contradiction for us here in St. George's Tron to say that prayer and the word must be at the heart of everything. It's not a contradiction then that we should dream dreams and have vision and formulate strategy.

It's not a contradiction. It demands that we do that. It's not just by God's spirit through the gospel that his kingdom is built. It's through his people. And we must be a people who preach and proclaim the word and who pray and who actually make things happen.

Not just people of theory but of practice. God builds his kingdom through his people where God is at work and men and women are at work. There's a fourth S and that's this.

[28 : 03] Service. Or service and sacrifice. That brings us to the last point. If God builds his kingdom through his people, his church, that doesn't mean that just a few do the work and the rest look on.

Kingdom building is not a spectator sport. Ephesians 4 is very clear on this, isn't it? God gives particular gifts of ministry of the word for some in the church in order that through their exercise of these gifts all the saints are equipped for works of ministry.

All attain maturity in the faith. All grow up in every way. And he says it's when every part is doing its work that the whole body grows. But only when every part is doing its work.

That's wonderfully illustrated for us in Nehemiah chapter 3. Just look at it. It's a huge great list of every person and family who built the walls. Begins verse 1 with the high priest with all his family.

Goes on verse 2 with the men of Jericho and the sons of Hassanah and on and on and on. Look at verse 9. Rephaia. He was a ruler of half of Jerusalem. He got onto the walls and rolled his sleeves up.

[29 : 16] Look at verse 12. Shalem, another ruler of half the city. He built it with his daughters. Think of that. Wouldn't be very good for their fingernails, would it? But there they are, all on the walls together.

The only blot in that whole chapter is in verse 5. Do you see? The nobles of Tekoa. Next to them the Tekoites repaired, but the nobles would not stoop to serve their lord.

Verse 27 interestingly shows the Tekoites repaired another section of the wall, perhaps an extra portion to make up. But do you see? Scripture alone is not enough. Prayer alone is not enough.

Not even prayer-driven scripture and strategy. There's actually got to be on top of all of that a service mentality, hasn't there? And we can be very slow to recognize this in the church, can't we?

We can be very precious. We can be very taken up with ourselves. Oh, I want to exercise my gifts. And this church doesn't allow me to exercise my gifts properly, so I'm going somewhere else.

[30 : 18] That's what we say, isn't it? Well, I have to tell you, the Bible's not interested in whether you want to exercise your gifts or not. The Bible's interested in whether you're willing to serve on the walls, building God's kingdom with the rest of his church.

New Testament doesn't say anything anywhere about us looking into ourselves, trying to recognize our own gifts and seek them to be fulfilled. No, it tells us to look where there's needs and where we can serve and get on with doing it.

We don't find people saying to Nehemiah, Oh, Nehemiah, I don't feel my gifts are really being used adequately in this place. I'd rather go off and do something else while you build. No. They saw the walls were in ruin, they understood what had to be done, and they rolled up their sleeves and did it.

By the way, that's what the Bible calls worship. Do you know that? It's the same word. To worship God, it's not about singing or dancing, either highbrow or lowbrow. It's about serving.

It's the same word. That's why it's so ridiculous when people talk about worship styles today. It's utterly irrelevant. Worship is serving. What does Paul say in Romans 12?

[31 : 32] Present your bodies as living sacrifices. That is your, well, it depends what your translation says. It might say spiritual worship. It might say reasonable service. It's hard to translate because it's the same word.

What he's saying is if you understand anything about worship, it's this, presenting your bodies as a living sacrifice, serving with the people of God. Christ's kingdom is built in Nehemiah's day, in Paul's day, in our day, by worshipping people, by churches and people who have a serving mentality.

but that kind of service does involve sacrifice. All true worship does. All true service does. Perhaps it means sacrificing our dignity, serving below our station, what the men of Tekoa wouldn't do but Nehemiah himself did.

It means a sacrifice of time and of energy and of money. That's often something that we find hardest, isn't it? Nehemiah chapter 5 shows us the great personal sacrifice that many had to make that Nehemiah himself made, foregoing his own lands, foregoing his own servants and putting them to work on the wall instead, instead of for his profit.

And for us in St. George's Tron, if we are to pursue together our God-given mission, that will mean sacrifice. Sacrifice of many things. We've got to face up to that if we're even going to think about being a worshipping church.

[33 : 05] Because we're in a war, you see, we're in a spiritual battle. And in a war, even many good and legitimate things have to be laid aside for the sake of the war effort. Isn't that right? And we don't just do it because we have to.

We do it because it's infinitely worth it. The Bible is clear, the war that we're involved in in building Christ's kingdom will not last forever. There's a peacetime coming, there's an eternity to enjoy.

But for now, for now, we're building the kingdom of Christ in times of trouble. It's a great war. And therefore, real worship involves sacrifice.

If it doesn't cost us, it's not worship. Do you remember when David wanted to build by the threshing floor of Arana to build the temple on, 2 Samuel 24? He says, I will not offer to the Lord my God that which costs me nothing.

And insisted, although the man wanted to give him the land, he insisted on paying. One obvious and tangible sacrifice is finance, isn't it, in an ongoing way to finance our mission as a congregation.

[34 : 17] And certainly, if we're going to be facing a major building project coming up before us, that will test us, won't it? It's probably going to cost us two million pounds or more to renovate this building, to really fit it for what we need to do here.

And just as Nehemiah couldn't build Jerusalem on his own, or just with his leaders, we can't build the mission in St. George's Tron unless we're all willing to serve, sacrificially.

In terms of building, well, we'll have to give a lot of money, won't we? Thousands of pounds for each of us. Some of us, many, many thousands of pounds. But many others have done that.

That shouldn't be a concern to us. Indeed, it'll be a great opportunity of blessing. Simply a matter of our view of worship, isn't it? Simply a matter of whether we see ourselves building for the present, for the material, or building for eternity, building for what lasts.

Some of us, I'm sure, would rightly be concerned about spending that large sum of money on ourselves. And indeed, it is a dangerous thing, isn't it, to spend a lot of money on ourselves to be focused?

[35 : 32] And that's why, if we do this, we're going to covenant together to add a tithe, 10% to what we raise, and covenant to give that first tenth away to the mission of the Lord Jesus Christ in other parts of the world where they have so little compared with our plenty.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 9, you know, of that attitude that we'll be enriched in every way for such generosity. He says to us that that service not only supplies the needs of others, but abounds in thanksgiving to God.

But God builds his kingdom in every way, whether it be material things like building churches, whether it be by paying for mission, whether it be giving time and effort and hard work and slogging for the sake of the kingdom.

he builds his kingdom through his people. And he can only do it through people who are willing to sacrifice and to serve. And that means all his people together.

There's no place for spectators in the building project of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. I keep coming back to chapter 3, verse 5, the noblemens of Tekoa who would not stoop to serve their Lord.

[36 : 45] And that's what history records of them. That's what eternity records of them. Their contribution to the mission of the kingdom of God. They would not stoop to serve their Lord.

Friends, as we look to the future here in St. George's Tron, let us covenant together as a congregation never to be like that, but to have a servant and a sacrificing attitude.

Let's rather be a people of Scripture shaped by the word of the gospel. A people of supplication, hearts given to prayer for the kingdom of Christ.

A people of strategy, making our dreams and visions into reality, making them happen. a people of sacrificial service, giving of our substance and of ourselves for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Scripture, supplication, strategy, sacrificial service. That is the Bible's pattern for mission.

[37 : 57] That's what the Spirit is saying to the church yesterday, today, until the Lord Jesus Christ comes. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we know our own hearts and we know that all too often we are possessed by the Spirit of the men of Tekoa.

Forgive us, we pray. Humble us beneath your mighty hand. By your grace, will you mold us and shape us by your word, putting in our hearts a desire for the prayers of your people, filling our minds with visions and dreams for building your kingdom and praising your name in the place that you've set us.

And help us, we pray, to sacrifice our very selves on the altar of service. That we might rejoice and be glad on the day when you come.

We might stand before you as worthy servants and enter our Master's joy. For Jesus Christ's sake.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

[39 : 47] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.