

Nehemiah Ch 4:1-23

As we read through these OT leadership/building books that speak of the work of God done by the will of God in the ways of God such as Ezra and Nehemiah there's a reoccurring theme that seems to come up over and over and over again. And that is that anytime God is working, the enemy will be resisting, God is pushing the work forward through people's lives, the enemy is probing and plotting the work's demise. It's true that if God grants you the *opportunity* to work that He'll equip you *for* that work, but equally true is that the enemy will do all he can to *oppose* that work. As God *advances* the work, the adversary will *attack* the work. But this much I know, God is not in to wasting His breath, if He says it, it's because we need to hear it, if He says it over and over and over again, it's because we need to be reminded of it over and over and over again.

And this particular theme of God's work encountering enemy opposition runs throughout the entirety of the word of God. Jesus said, "*The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way.*" Matt 13:24-25

God's seeking to *do* a work; the enemy is seeking to *ruin* the work. Paul told the Eph elders in Acts Ch 20, "*For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.*" Acts 20:29-30 God seeking to *establish* the work, the enemy seeking to *undermine* the work, you remember that Paul told the Corinthians about his work there in Ephesus that a great and effective door had opened *to* him there, but that there were many adversaries *against* him there, much resistance. I always like what Peter had to say about enemy onslaught, he said, "*Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you;*" 1 Peter 4:12 and The reason I'm so fond of that is because if you're anything like me (and I suspect you are) whenever you're going through a fiery trial, we just find ourselves in awe and utter amazement as if it's some strange thing. We're thinking, "Is there sin in my life, God is there something I'm missing here, have I strayed off the path in some way?" All of which are good questions and being open to a good heart check up now and then is certainly healthy for our spiritual demeanor. But we take this position like, "I can't believe this is happening, what have I done? Lord I've been trying to serve You." Bingo, *that's* what you've done, you've got the enemy all riled up and now he's coming against the work of God in your life.

And God would have us to know that these things are going to happen, when you gave your heart to Christ, you enlisted during wartime, not peace time. And what's the bible say? "*You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*" 2 Tim 2:3 Notice it's not, "You therefore *might* endure hardship." It's "You *must* endure hardship," if you're to fight the good fight as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

And so over and over again throughout God's Word He reminds us in picture, in principle, through examples that are practical that His work in you, His work through you, will bring enemy resistance to you, that you might be prayed up and prepared to deal with enemy attack appropriately. You recall that Peter told his readers that as long as he was in his tent (that is alive and able to speak to them personally) that he would remind them of these things specifically. And then he wrote it again in his epistle being careful to ensure that (as he said) we would *always* have a reminder of these things after his decease. We forget, thank God that He's faithful to remind.

We left off last week with the work of the rebuilding of the walls around Jerusalem in full swing, the people working diligently, the work coming along incredibly. People from all walks of life, various professions and political platforms, men, women, rich, poor, all working side by side for a common purpose in seeing God's will in Heaven translate into work *done* on earth.

And that's a picture of the way the church operates today, all one in Christ, working together for a common goal to the glory of God, doesn't matter where you come from, what you've done, or who you are, in Christ we're all one, no one's work less relevant than the other's. We all need each other and together we're able to get the job done, but as we've been speaking, understand that an *advancing work* will meet *adversarial resistance*. Ch 4

Vs1-3

Sanballat and Tobiah, perhaps you remember these guys from earlier on in ch 2, when they heard the news that there was a man who'd come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel they were "deeply disturbed." As long as the people of God were weak, open and subject to the dominating influence of the enemy over their lives, they didn't make much of the activity going on in and around Jerusalem. But when something, or someone came along that rocked that boat a little bit, began to under-gird and strengthen the resolve of the *people* of God towards the propelling of a *project* of God, they started getting nervous. Remember they began to laugh at them, and despise them. Here, now that the work is well underway we find them *furious, very indignant*, and they began to mock the Jews.

That is, they began to belittle their intelligence, and ridicule them, now this is a common yet very effective weapon in our enemy's arsenal. Ridicule and mockery, Goliath mocked the armies of Israel everyday, intimidating them, making a laughing stock of them, and it paralyzed them, they just stayed stationary, ceased advancing in the work. He sought to employ the same technique on David, but it didn't quite work out the same for him, why? Because David held the proper perspective, knew that greater was He who was in him than he that is of the World. That if God be for you, than who can be against you. Jesus was mocked and assailed as He hung on the cross, "Hey come down off the cross if You're the Son of God, He saved others, but He can't even save Himself." Of course that didn't have the desired effect of the enemy either because Jesus went through with God's plan of redemption for the sin of the world. But the point is that Satan will use this particular weapon in his warfare all the time.

Because he knows that we as humanity don't like dealing with ridicule, we'd rather lie low, stay in the shadows, and just avoid the sarcastic criticism or belittling remarks of people around us than to be open target practice for people because they know we're Christians. But in that position we're virtually rendered useless or ineffective because we're not allowing God to show Himself *through* us or speak to people *by* us and so there we are in that weak anemic state of non-effective Christianity. So recognize it when it comes, we don't wrestle flesh and blood, sure people may be instrumental, but so often at it's root it's a spiritual issue, the enemy seeking to rip into us by ridicule, or mockery in order to discourage us from the work.

And he'll mock you on every level. On a personal level, notice vs 2, "What are these *feeble* Jews doing?" He's mocking their person, feeble, weak, really ill equipped and unable to do such a monumental task on their own. And he's right, that's sometimes what makes the sting so much more critically wounding because we're reminded of our own inadequacies, but here's the deal, that's reasoning in the natural, not the supernatural. In the world, qualifications can be paramount, but in the Kingdom qualifications *don't amount* really to anything. Remember this passage? "*For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.*" 1 Cor 1:26-29

So often the fact that you're not qualified is the only qualification that God is looking for in order to use your life in a radical way. Because as we read there in 2nd Cor where Jesus said, "*My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.*" 2 Cor 12:9 Our weakness creates an avenue for God's strength to be shown. You see where the enemy went wrong was in looking at the ability of the workers rather than the ability of the One who was doing the work. It's God's work.

But the enemy will mock your person, your project, "Will they fortify themselves?" You know, "You're going to do what? That's the dumbest thing I've ever heard." He'll mock the practicality of it, your perspective in it. "Will they pray the wall up? Are they going to offer sacrifices to see if God will do it? Will they complete it in a day?" The idea there being that these guys don't even know that they're getting themselves into, that this is a project way over their head and that they obviously haven't considered the magnitude of such a work. They're even mocking the materials they're using, "Old burnt stones out of piles of debris..." They're just being hammered hard on every level.

In vs 3 Tobiah gets in on the action accusing them of being clueless as to how to do it right anyway, "Even if a fox climbs up on it, it'll break down." "It won't be able to endure the slightest stress. As if women, and goldsmiths, perfumers and politicians have clue about construction."

They're really seeking to discourage them and discouragement is such a powerful weapon because it's really just the antithesis of faith. As to where faith believes God, trusts in His Word, clings to His promises and all of that, expects the best, discouragement expects the worst, believes that the worst will take place. It pretty much forgets about God, His word, His promises, His faithfulness and all the rest. We pray differently in faith or under discouragement, we work differently under faith or discouragement, we filter the word of God differently through faith than we do discouragement, its no wonder Satan wants you and wants me discouraged.

But listen here's the deal, the king had given them permission to do this work, and have even freely extended his resources to ensure that they were properly equipped for this work. The enemies had no legal authority to actually stop the work, all they could do was seek to discourage them so that they'd cease on their own. The same thing holds true for you and me, the King of Kings has "licensed" you to be busy about His work, He's even freely extended to you every resource you need in order to ensure success in the work and to make sure you're properly equipped *for* the work. Your enemy has no authority to actually cause you to stop in the work, all he can do is seek to ridicule you, criticize you, demoralize and discourage you into ceasing voluntarily. Don't get discouraged, continue to press forward by faith, the bible says, "*Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.*" Heb 10:38-39

Now, when we're up against this point, how are we to handle it? Being bombarded by belittling comments, discouraged in the work, notice what Nehemiah did.

Vs4-6

What do we see going on here? He's engaging the enemy through intercession, he cries out to God, then carries on in the work. And what we want to see here is that for Nehemiah prayer wasn't his last *resort*, but rather his 1st *resource*. He didn't debate *with* the enemy, form a committee to decide what to do *about* the enemy, he just immediately took the situation to God in prayer. And there's a side of us that really likes his prayer, we'd like to pray similar prayers now and then ourselves.

"Turn their reproach on their own heads, give them as plunder into a land of captivity, don't cover their iniquity, or let their sin be blotted out." These prayers remind us of some of David's prayers about breaking people's teeth and filling their mouths with gravel and all. Real picturesque kinda prayers.

But really as NT believers Jesus instructed us otherwise, #1 if we were to pray these kinds of prayers, odds are it would be for the purposes of personal vengeance as opposed to being zealous for the glory of God, but the bible is clear that vengeance is the Lord's He'll repay.

But 2^{ndly} Jesus said, “*You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven;*” Matt 5:43-45 So at times we want to pray, “God break their teeth out,” but how much better to pray, “God bring them to know You.” Because really all those other issues will disappear if they truly begin to walk with Christ themselves.

Then in vs 6 they got back to the work, why? For the people had a mind to work, and in many ways this could be seen as God’s answer to Nehemiah’s prayers. The enemy was seeking to bring the work to an end, but God gave the people a mind to work, the mental disposition concerning things is such an important key. We’re transformed (the bible says) by the renewing of our minds, we’ve been given the *mind* of Christ, God gave them a *mind* to work and so the work was completed up to the ½ way point, the people pressed on. The enemy was seeking to undermine the work, Nehemiah prayed and God responded by giving the people a *mind to* work. Vs7-9

It seems that Satan never has a lack for people prepared to do his bidding doesn’t it? Now there’s a united confederation of nations lined up in every direction against the nation of Israel. The Samaritans to the North, Arabs to the South, Ammonites to the East, and Ashdodites (Philistine country) to the West. Surrounded on all sides and what was the agenda? To attack Israel and create confusion, the bible is clear that God is not the author of confusion but of peace. But the enemy will attack your life, bring confusion *into* your life, again notice how Nehemiah responded. “We made our prayer to our God, and set a watch against them day and night.” and Again I’d have you take note of how Nehemiah blends spirituality and practicality, they made their prayer, (spirituality) but then they set a watch (practicality). God expects that we act responsibly and prudently in a given situation, some people use prayer as an excuse for laziness. You ask them about something and when they say, “I’ll pray about it.” What they’re really doing is throwing up a smoke screen and making their escape because in reality they no intentions of doing anything. It’d be better to simply say, “You know what it’d be best if you found someone else right now because (for whatever reason) I can’t, or don’t want to.” Obviously there are things we need to pray over before we commit to, but I think you know what I mean, these kinds of phrases can be used as Christian euphemisms for what would otherwise be a negative response.

But what we’re seeing here is spiritual and the practical at work together, it’s the “Watch and pray” principle that Jesus taught. We should be prayerful, but our prayers should be stirring us to action. It’s not a lack of faith for them to set a watch, it’s because they trust in the Lord that they set the watch. Prayer is not an excuse for inaction, it’s prayer that *prompts* us to act. “I needed a job so and made my prayer to God and filled out applications.” (You see)

Vs10

You know I would imagine that about now Nehemiah was about ready to scream. Being faced with danger on a daily basis, trying to facilitate a seemingly impossible task, ridicule and confusion coming in from the outside, now your leaders growing fatigued, overwhelmed and caving in on the inside.

And to a small extent I can identify with that, it's tough when there's pressure coming in from the outside, people being overwhelmed and growing fatigued on the inside. And all the more when it's the leaders, I mean this was the tribe of Judah, the tribe from which come the kings, they should've been the ones setting the standards *in* the work, not the 1st to fail because of the overwhelming seeming abundance *of* the work.

And this ½ way point is critical, it's like so much has been done, but there's still so much to *be* done. The fact is that the rubbish had to be removed, there was no choice, and the same lies true for us, there's not much that can be built for the glory of God in our lives as long as the rubbish from the world, or of the flesh lies heaped up all around us. That stuff needs to be dealt with and swept away, it can be discouraging to look around at all the work that still needs done in our lives. But it's got to be done, and look at what's been done so far, look how far God has brought you, it's too soon to quit, you can't give up now, just keep tending to the work.

We don't even read where Nehemiah even responded to these guys, good example. No reason to entertain complainers, just carry on in the work. But this is another true testimony to the leadership of Nehemiah, it's relatively easy and pretty fun to lead when everyone is enthusiastic about the work. But what do you do when everyone is getting sick of the work, when that enthusiasm begins to fade. It'd have been real ez for Nehemiah to say, "You know what, I don't need this, I've got a nice cool palace, the finest delicacies and the ear of the king awaiting me back home, I'm outta here, you want to gripe, have a good day." But he didn't do that, he was going to sink, or sail with the ship, he plotted his course, and carried on.

Vs11-12

Now whether that was a literal 10 times or not I don't know. The phrase "10 times" seems to be a Hebrew idiom for saying, "Over and over again." Remember Jacob told Laban, "I've lived with you for 20 yrs. Worked 14 yrs to have your daughters as my wives, 6 yrs for your flock and you've changed my wages 10 times." The point being over and over again you've ripped me off. In Numbers God speaks of Israel putting Him to the test 10 times, so more than likely the point here is that they just kept telling Nehemiah with a sense of urgency that an attack was coming! They were fearful, another weapon of the enemies warfare, fear tactics, fear will freeze you right up, what does Nehemiah do?

Vs13

1st of all he places armed men at any of the most vulnerable places at the walls and he makes sure their families are with them. This served a 2 fold purpose, 1st of all they'd stay and fight in their family was in harms way, but it also helped them not be distracted and worried about the safety of their families apart from their being there to protect them. And we spoke about this last week, being there to serve/protect and fight for our families is critical, so he makes sure their families are in order, then he speaks to their faith. Fear is dispelled through faith, I'm fearful when I'm absent minded of God's power, God's presence and God's promise. The book of Heb says, "*For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'*" So we may boldly say: "*The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?*" Heb 13:5-6 David said, "*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; (why) For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.*" Ps 23:4 Mindful of God's power, His presence, and His promise, therefore my fear is dispelled, so Nehemiah sets their families in order, and speaks to their faith.

Vs14

And "They may take our lives, but they'll never take our FREEDOM!!"

I mean this is some kinda William Wallace "Brave Heart" kind of a moment isn't it? He calls upon them to not fear, but to remember the Lord, and His faithfulness, how that if God be for you, than who can be against you?

Vs15

You might draw attention to that last phrase in vs 15 because that represents the victory, it wasn't defending the wall that reflected the victory, because the people of God wouldn't really be at peace or have true security until the wall was built, it was getting back to work the constituted the victory. The enemy was hoping that they wouldn't be watching, that they wouldn't be ready, but because they were prudent, prayerful, and pursued God's plan in the practical, the enemy shrunk back.

Vs16-22

From sun up to sun down they were working fervently and diligently and they had the sword ready for one hand, the trowel fitted in the other, 1/2 the people were working, 1/2 the people were on guard and those who were from neighboring communities didn't travel at home come night fall but rather stayed on duty as night watchmen. I mean this is some serious attention being given to this task, Daniel said that the wall would be built in troublesome times and surely that was true. But the same thing applies to you and me, the enemy harassing, seeking to hinder the work, discourage you, mock you, overwhelm you and frustrate you. But the message that's being sent here is clear, the build and the battle go hand in hand, building and battling is only to be expected, but the picture found here is the principle that Paul utters in 1 Cor 15:58, "*...my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*"

The sword in one hand and the trowel in the other, both are needed for kingdom business, be it to build up with the trowel, or to deal with enemy onslaught via the sword we need both.

Vs 23

I'm glad he included that bit of information, they did get undressed now and again to wash off. Or else it'd have been a pretty rank and vile ordeal. But the point here is that they were ready in season and out, they were never off guard, and this is the attitude we should be armed with as believers today. Always ready, always clothed in the righteousness of Christ, always fully suited in the full armor of God, and though we may be spread out here and there in various places and at various portions of the wall, when that final trumpet blasts, that we'll be prepared to rally to that point and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

Prayer points: Lord help us to stand strong, being immovable, always abounding in the work that You've called us to do. Keep us mindful of Your presence, of Your power, and of Your promise to never leave us nor forsake us but to always be with us even to the end of the age. Help us to be those who move in the balance of prayerful/practical, to make our prayer to You, then to put feet to our faith and get busy because we trust in You. And Lord help us not to think it strange when we come under attack when all we're trying to do is serve You, but rather to take heart, knowing that he has no authority to cause Your work in our lives to cease and that we would place our confidence in You, and be used in such ways as to bring glory *to* You. And we look forward to that trumpet blast that will gather us all to be at Your side and so shall we ever be with You, and for that Lord we give you praise.