

PP Nehemiah: Opposition and Its Right Responses!

Text Nehemiah 4:10-14

Part 16-9/22-23/2012

So far, we've looked at three strategies our enemies use to stop us from building God's kingdom
Criticism, conspiracy and confusion, and so far in Jerusalem, they haven't worked
But now the battle goes underground and we'll see three new strategies that we also experience

PP 4-Discouragement

"In Judah it was said, "The strength of those who bear the burdens is failing. There is too much rubble. By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall." 4:10

Discouragement is an attack of the mind, and a fog so subtle that you don't see it until too late
It burrows into your mind and once there it begins to wreak its deadly havoc
Let's notice three parts to our enemies' strategy of discouragement:

PP a. Fatigue-*"In Judah it was said, "The strength of those who bear the burdens is failing."*

PP 'failing' means to stumble or stagger; they were physically exhausted doing the Lord's work
The Greeks had a warning about this: *'You will break the bow if you keep it always bent.'*

One minister said as he was dying at age 20, *"God gave me a message to deliver and a horse to ride. Alas, I have killed the horse and now I cannot deliver the message."* McCheyne

The biographies of great people of God are filled with soul-crushing, body-numbing weariness

PP Christian service is marked by the output and input: ***"So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day."*** 2 Cor. 4:16

If we are not renewed daily, we will lose heart and become discouraged

PP b. Near-Sightedness-*"There is too much rubble."*

Can you imagine what Jerusalem looked like when Nehemiah arrived?

It was a city destroyed by Babylon and desolate for 70 years while the Jews were in captivity

The walls had been pulled down, the gates burned, houses demolished, weeds everywhere

This rubble wasn't a neat pile of blocks that just needed to be put back in place

They were half-buried by dirt, hidden under weeds, choking ravines and gullies, and it had to be dealt with in order for the wall to be built

The eyes of the workers had fallen on the rubble instead of the wall which was half rebuilt

The rubble of sin and worldliness must be moved to get back to the foundation of Christ!

Haven't you seen the rubble in your life and lost heart?

Or the rubble in someone else's and given up hope of helping them?

They lost the vision of a rebuilt wall and gates of praise, and only saw the difficulty of the mission of the work in front of them

In the fog of the enemy, they forgot what Paul later taught us, ***"we walk by faith, not by sight."***

PP 2 Corinthians 5:7

This same fog gets into our minds today and pulls our eyes to the rubble rather than the promise
My marriage is too far gone, it will never be restored!

This battle with sin is too powerful, I will never defeat it!
This area has always been terrible, our little church won't make any difference!
My unbelieving parents are too old, they will never turn to Christ!
The economy is too bad, I'll never get a job!

Our enemies want our eyes on the rubble, not on God!
Discouragement is a vision problem, more accurately, it happens when we get our eyes off of the hope of the gospel and onto the scope of our problem

PP c. Doubting- *“By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall.”*

When fatigue sets in and our eyes shift from Christ, the result is nearly always doubt, the final ingredient that produces discouragement

In verse 6, Nehemiah wrote that *‘the people had a mind to work.’*

Now, discouragement has draped across their minds like a fog, they couldn't see how to do it
They lost sight of how far they had come in the strength of the Lord
Doubt is a faith issue, when our eyes are no longer on the power and goodness of God!

But notice who the tired discouraged people were: *“In Judah...”* 4:10

This likely refers to the tribe of *‘Judah’* rather than the whole *‘house of Judah’* in verse 16

This was the very tribe from which David was born, and from which Jesus would come

PP Notice how Jesus is referred to in **Revelation 5:5**, *“And one of the elders said to me, “Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that He can open the scroll and its seven seals.”*

They had David's blood running through their veins and theirs would run through Christ's

This had been prophesied in Genesis 49:10

The enemy was targeting most intensely those from whom would come the Messiah, Jesus Christ

Now let me point out what should wake us up a little more alertly to this same creeping fog

The true church, the called out assembly of born again believers in Christ, we carry the promise of the Messiah today and hold Him out to the world

The more your life bears the name of Jesus Christ, the more your enemy will come against you!

But that alone does not answer why they fell into such deep discouragement

Let me briefly show you why they did, so page ahead to chapter 6 with me for a moment

PP *“Moreover, in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them. For many in Judah were bound by oath to him.”* Neh. 6:17-18

Remember, Tobiah represents to us today the sin nature, the flesh that we battle inside us

Judah was bound to Tobiah, the way many Christians bind themselves to their flesh

Tobiah had no *‘portion or right or claim in Jerusalem’* (2:20), but Judah gave allegiance to him anyways

Satan, you have claim over us, we are no longer under your control, Jesus has redeemed us

World, you have no portion with us, you have nothing that can truly satisfy our souls

And flesh, you have no right to us any more, for we consider ourselves dead to you

We may be dead to sin, but we can partner with it and strengthen it so that it increases wrong

desires within us
It is no wonder that the messianic tribe of Judah was under attack, and we can see why they became so discouraged as they were in partnership with the enemy

PP 5-Dread

Illus My father served in WWII and told me of the German V-1 Flying Bombs, or better known as buzzbombs. As these missiles flew through the air, often above the clouds, you could hear a loud buzzing. When the buzz stopped, it meant the bomb was diving toward its target. You couldn't see it but you could hear it, not knowing where it would land. I'll never forget his description of the dreadful terror those rockets produced in him.

“And our enemies said, “They will not know or see till we come among them and kill them and stop the work.” Nehemiah 4:11

Dread has us always looking over our shoulders, waiting for the enemy to attack, and it is nearly impossible to maintain your focus
How ironic that Judah, whose flags carried the symbol of a lion, was reduced to scared kittens
This was a propaganda campaign to inspire fear, the terrorist group who is claiming responsibility before launching the deadly event
This loss of security is debilitating, which is the strategy to begin with
Friends, our enemy's most intense attacks usually come just before our greatest victories!

PP 6-Distraction

“At that time the Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said to us ten times, “You must return to us.” 4:10-12

These Jews do not refer to the tribe of Judah, these refer to those who live in the midst of the enemy
We can see in them today those in the church who are indistinguishable from those in the world
And these Jews kept insisting that the workers lay down their tools and come home
The phrase ***‘said to us ten times’*** is a Hebrew expression meaning over and over
These complaining Jews should have been in Jerusalem helping the construction, but the pull of the world was too strong for them and instead they would not put their hands to God's work and were trying to distract those who were from their commitment

Let me sum up these three strategies this way:

First, even the best among us, if they are in league with the **flesh**, will spread discouragement

Second, **Satan** will roar out threats and try and make us live in dread and fear

Third, those who are immersed in the **world** will distract those who want to serve God

We see the schemes of all three enemies, all covert, and all potentially disastrous

PP The Responses of God's People

We've seen that Nehemiah took criticism to God in prayer and refused to defend himself, rather he got off his knees and went back to work trusting his heavenly Father to handle it
Then conspiracy and confusion began to spread so all the workers went to God in prayer and

then got off their knees and set a guard around the clock
Now the enemy is sowing discouragement, dread and division, how will Nehemiah respond?
Let's keep in mind that Nehemiah is a type of Christ: his life pointed to One greater than him
The response of Nehemiah moves us to see what Jesus Christ is doing among us as our leader
“So in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in open places, I stationed the people by their clans with their swords, their spears, and their bows.” 4:13

PP 1-Fortify

The ***‘lowest parts’*** were the areas of the wall that were most susceptible to attack
And the ***‘open places’*** were sections of the wall that left the people most exposed to the enemies
In short, we must learn to live together, standing together in the gap of our individual weaknesses
Do you know the places in your life where the enemies can get through, your vulnerable areas?
Maybe for you it is when you are with certain people, or when you go to certain places
Perhaps it is a particular part of your life like your speech, or what you spend money on
Are they getting through your wall in a breach of a wound that someone inflicted on you?
Now resentment has grown to bitterness by which many are defiled?
Maybe your vulnerability is that you've been hurt in your marriage, and susceptible to temptation with another person

Is there a part of your life that you think is no problem and you've left it wide open and defenseless?

As Gordon MacDonald wrote, *‘An unguarded strength is a double weakness’*
Our enemies know how to exploit the ***‘lowest parts’*** and ***‘open places’***

Nehemiah reorganizes the people and fortifies these vulnerable areas
He takes people out of solo ministry and puts them in groups
And he groups the people according to their clans so families are no longer divided
The family has always been the first line of defense against our enemies which is why we can clearly see such an aggressive effort from Satan to destroy marriage, and destroy family
If he can break marriages, and divide the family, he can exploit those open places and low walls
Couples, when you can, serve in the church side by side and families, when you can, serve in the church together
You will shore up open places and lowest parts on your spiritual walls

PP 2-Focus

“And I looked and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people...” 14a

Nehemiah looked first, then arose-*he had likely been in prayer-* and acted!
He always aimed before he fired, and he learned what to aim at by going to God and prayer
“Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, Who is great and awesome” 14b

How do we deal with discouragement, dread and distraction?

PP We ***‘remember the Lord’***, meaning we *call the Lord to mind*

The name '**Lord**' is *Adonai*, which the Jews would use in place of Yahweh, the sacred name of God

Its meaning is master and owner and we are to call that to mind when we are frightened
Nehemiah is telling his discouraged people, we are God's possession and He will guard it

Even more, Nehemiah tells them to call to mind that God is '**great and awesome**'

PP God is '**great**', meaning He outranks every other authority in sovereign might, with '**awesome**', He has absolute and overwhelming power

PP "***If God is for us, who can be against us?***" **Romans 8:31**

Nehemiah was in Jerusalem with the letters of authority from the most powerful ruler on earth
Yet our authority is much higher as it comes from the King of kings, so stand strong!

PP 3-Fight

"and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes." 14

Christian brothers and sisters, we must get in the fight!

There are no sidelines in spiritual conflict, no reprieve, no truce, no flag of surrender will wave
Any lull in the battle is just our enemies adjusting their strategies

We're always at the horse gate of war, and we must stand strong with sword, spear and bow

But also notice from this verse the wisdom of Nehemiah: the antidote for discouragement is
often as simple as getting our eyes off ourselves and onto others

'fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes.'

I've noticed that when my attention gets on others, the fog of discouragement blows away

Have your enemies blown the mists of discouragement into you, so you are full of anxiety?

They are trying to distract you from being effective in the kingdom of God

So stand with others, with your family of God!

Call to your mind the faithfulness and sovereign power of our God

And take out your sword, spear and bow and be ready to fight!

PP "***Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.***" **Ephesians 6:10-11**

Pray