

PP **Nehemiah: The Lord is Faithful!**

Text Nehemiah 6:15-19

Part 22, 1/5-6, 2013

Illus “Never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never-in nothing, great of small, large or petty, never give in except to convictions of honour and good sense. Never yield to force, never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy.” Winston Churchill, 10/29, 1941

In biblical days, a city without walls was a city of reproach, unprotected and unable to thrive
As the book of Nehemiah opens, the Jews were in **“great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire.” 1:3**

They had powerful enemies keeping them in reproach: Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem
Who had a series of strategies to prevent the Jews from rebuilding the wall of their city
But God is in the rebuilding business and like the poem by Maltbie Babcock, He says to us:

PP “Be strong! We are not here to play, dream, to drift;
We have hard work to do and loads to lift;
Shun not the struggle; face it- ‘tis God’s gift.
Be strong! Be strong!” Poem by Maltbie Babcock

Be strong, our enemies will never yield, be strong even in the face of their overwhelming might

PP Why, because **“the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.” 2 Thessalonians 3:3**

We are all called to be rebuilders of broken walls, and we must remember that our Lord is faithful, He will establish us and He will guard us from the evil one

PP 1-God will establish you!

“So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days.” 6:15

PP The wall was finished Elul the 25th which is to us, mid-August to mid-September
There are two main estimates of the length of this wall: just under 2 miles, or around 2 ½ miles
Archeologists have excavated parts of Nehemiah’s wall and found it to be 9 feet thick
We might be inclined to say that building this in 52 days was a miracle!
I would suggest that while this was an impressive feat, the physical construction wasn’t a miracle

The Roman General Titus as he later demolished Jerusalem had a wall built around the city in just three days...24,000 feet long including 13 war towers
Alexander the Great built the walls of Alexandria, nearly 8 miles in compass between 20-30 days
Nehemiah’s wall was impressive, done with fewer people

Webster defines a miracle as divine intervention in human affairs that produces an extraordinary event
Biblical stories of healings and angelic visits tend to color our perspective that God only works in overt, observable, visible ways
Avoiding what seemed to be a sure car accident; exact amount in check that we needed to cover a financial crisis; a timely word to give us hope through a difficult time; healing when the doctors gave a bleak prognosis

And while these things sometimes occur, and when they do, bring glory to God
But it is interesting to note, there are no miraculous events recorded in Nehemiah
What we see is the hand of God working behind the scenes, below the surface, and beneath the
eye of casual observation

You see this in the person who wonderfully, and maybe a little surprisingly, discovers freedom
from addiction, or the slow reconciliation of a long time rift in a relationship
Or a marriage that once was on the rocks and is now thriving or a person once hardened
against Christianity now serving faithfully in the church
God is constantly at work in us, but like an iceberg, most of His activity lies below the surface

The rebuilding of this wall in 52 days was impressive, but what revealed the hand of God was
that despite every single surrounding nation opposing this work, they succeeded
God will establish you brother and sister!

He can and will, as you walk with Him, repair the wall and restore the gates!

God's establishing power was so surprising and noticeable that their enemies *"perceived that
this work had been accomplished with the help of our God."*

When God establishes His people in the strength of their salvation, there will be results:

PP a) It will bring respect to those who oppose God

"And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid..." 6:16a

This accomplishment was so great that all the nations were afraid, meaning they were in awe
Both the KJV and the NASB infer that they heard about it, then went and saw it to be true, and
were afraid

So awesome was the persevering, establishing power of God, they saw their utter helplessness

PP b) It will discourage our enemies

"...fell greatly in their own esteem"

Their confidence in their own power and greatness fell greatly

Have you ever realized that Satan can feel fear and nervous discouragement?

His rage is fueled by fear, and what he fears is the power of God!

As our church becomes more effective in rebuilding a spiritual wall around the east-end of the
Lehigh Valley, we will see our enemy mounting his attacks

He will try and convince us we cannot financially afford what we are trying to do

That no one will come to these services

That the counseling center will fail and Riverside is a waste of time and resources

He will bring greater temptation and we will experience times of discouragement and confusion

Yet our confidence is in knowing that *"the Lord is faithful. He will establish you"*

And when He does,

PP c) It will increase the reputation of our God

"for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God."

I am encouraged that what scared and deflated these enemies was not the leadership skill of

Nehemiah nor the strength of the builders...it was the power of God
And our enemies will not be daunted by our skills or giftedness or effort, but by our God!
What scares and discourages the enemies of God is the power of our God

PP *“Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.” Zechariah 4:6*

It is the power of the Spirit of God that we move to our second point
Not only will God establish us,

PP **2-God will guard you!**

Spencer Johnson, in Who Moved My Cheese?, asked a question: *What would you do if you weren't afraid?*

Bike across the country; hike the Appalachian trail; quit your job and start a company?
Let me change the question slightly: *What would you do for the Lord if you weren't afraid?*
Talk to that friend about Christ; step onto the mission field; join a ministry?

PP Let me remind us again of the sure promise of **2 Thessalonians**, *“the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.”* **3:3**

Fear is, I think, the number one strategy of the devil and again we see it used against Nehemiah

Notice how verse 17 begins: *‘Moreover, in those days...’*

It could be read, [*While we were building the wall*], *‘the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them.’* **17**

And this is a subtle lesson that is too easily lost

Let me put it this way and then explain it...these enemies never gave up, they never quit!

Turn briefly to chapter 13 and let me underscore this point

Still Tobiah is trying to worm his way into Jerusalem-**13:8**

The nations of the world are continuing to try and pull the Jews away from obedience-**13:23**

And Sanballat is still trying to desecrate their worship-**13:28**

They never give up, and Tobiah is exceptionally skilled at finding links into Israel: *“For many in Judah were bound by oath to him”* **6:17a**

Do you remember in chapter 2, verse 20, that Tobiah is called *‘the Ammonite servant’*?

The Ammonites were enemies of Israel, and as Moses taught in **Deuteronomy 23**, they were not allowed to *“enter the assembly of the LORD...You shall not seek their peace or their prosperity all your days forever.”* **3-6**

They were illegitimate cousins of the Jews, originating from Lot, the nephew of Abraham

They spoke a language similar to the Jews' Hebrew language, settled in the land next to them

And this is where we begin to see how Tobiah relates to us today

He represents what the New Testament calls the old nature, the old man, or the flesh

Friends, each of us has this enemy waging war within us, these *‘affections and desires that run contrary to God...in every area of life.’* Martin Luther

PP *“For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”* **Romans 8:7-8**

It is part of us, it battles inside us, and it will, by diminishing degree as we walk with God, stay with us until we are finally and fully changed by Jesus Christ

PP Susanna Wesley, mother of John and Charles described this battle this way: *“Whatever weakens your reasoning, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense*

of God, or takes away your relish for spiritual things, in short – if anything increases the authority and the power of the flesh over the Spirit, that to you becomes sin however good it is in itself.”¹

Tobiah was the entrenched enemy who of the three, was able to get inside the walls and look how he did: ***“many in Judah were bound by oath to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah the son of Arah: and his son Jehohanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah as his wife.”*** 6:18

Many in Judah, meaning many in the southern kingdom of Israel, were bound, yoked to him through trade ventures as well as through marriage ties

They had yoked themselves to Tobiah, who wanted to destroy them and keep them in ***‘great trouble and shame’***

Tobiah ***‘was the son-in-law of Shecaniah the son of Arah’*** who was one of Israel’s priests ***‘and his son Jehohanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah as his wife.’*** 6:18

Meshullam, the hard worker who had tirelessly built two sections of the wall in chapter 3 ***“Also they spoke of his good deeds in my presence and reported my words to him.”*** 6:19

How incredible that ‘many in Judah’ were so deceived when during this same time, Tobiah was mocking them claiming that even a fox’s weight would collapse their flimsy wall

It was Tobiah who had with Sanballat, hired false prophets to discredit Nehemiah

When we yoke ourselves to the flesh, our thinking becomes distorted and wrong begins to look right

What we never would have thought ok before, slowly becomes more than ok, it becomes good

We discover in 13:7 that he was even given a guest chamber in the House of God

He made himself look good in the eyes of many of the Jews, until it seemed only Nehemiah could see Tobiah’s true character and intent

It is the same strategy Satan used with Eve as he discussed her into a twisted mind, so that she

PP ***“saw the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise”*** **Genesis 3:6**

The mind is the battlefield where we meet with the enemy, and victory is either gained or lost

PP It is why we’re commanded, ***“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”*** **Romans 12:3**

PP It is why we are warned, ***“To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.”*** **Romans 8:6**

Our weapon is the mind-renewing power of the Word of God

PP I haven’t yet told you what the name ***Tobiah*** means...*Yahweh is good*

PP His son, ***Jehohanan***’ means *Yahweh is favorable*, and grew in popularity to become the name John in the NT

He looked good, and many in Judah, the tribe that was set apart, from whom the Messiah would

¹ <http://www.gotquestions.org/the-flesh.html>

come, were deceived
Friends, this is deliberate...the more you are in a position to magnify the Lord Jesus Christ, the more your flesh will work to deceive

Let me end, perhaps a little abruptly, with this!

Notice the final part of verse 19, ***“And Tobiah sent letters to make me afraid.”***

Fear almost always lives in the strategies of our enemies

“For they all wanted to frighten us, thinking, “Their hands will drop from the work, and it will not be done.” But now, O God, strengthen my hands.” Nehemiah 6:9

Eve, God is holding out on your happiness, you are less than you could be and all you need to do is follow your desires and take the fruit

It is the same hollow promise behind every addiction, every sin, every baited hook of temptation
If our enemies can produce fear in our hearts, they are on the way to victory

Nehemiah lived on his knees, his mind clearly on the Word of God, knowing that ***“the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.” 2 Thess. 3:3***

And we must do the same!

“Never yield to force, never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy.”

Churchill

Pray