

PP Nehemiah: Standing Firm and Building Well!

Text Nehemiah 4:15-23

Part 17-9/29-30/2012

PP *“O God, do not keep silence...For behold, your enemies make an uproar; those who hate you have raised their heads. They lay crafty plans against your people; they consult together against your treasured ones. They say, “Come, let us wipe them out as a nation; let the name of Israel be remembered no more!” For they conspire with one accord” Psalm 83:1-5*

God has enemies who are in league with each other, and they lay crafty plans against His people
We are in war, and battle rages around every single one of us
How do we build spiritual walls and at the same time battle these enemies?
Our passage today will go a long way to answer exactly that

PP 1-Our Enemies hate the light! 4:15

As we study verse 15, pay attention to why the enemies turned away

PP a) *Their strategies were discovered-‘heard that it was known to us’*

Our enemies prefer to work in the shadows where they can operate in secret
“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away.” Matthew 13:24-25

Our enemies love darkness, and bringing their strategies into the light will cause them to flee
But being exposed alone is not enough, our God must work!

PP b) *God moved powerfully!-‘and that God had frustrated their plan’*

These enemies are ultimately aiming their weapons at God, like the criminal who threatens the child to get revenge on the parents

God defends His people and demonstrates His power to do so throughout the Scriptures

PP *“He frustrates the devices of the crafty, so that their hands achieve no success.” Job 5:12*

God frustrates our enemies, so that their *‘plan’* or *‘plot’*, verse 15, achieves no success?
I find Nehemiah’s use of singular *‘plan’* to be interesting, given that he has taught us 6 strategies
But the enemies had one plan...prevent God’s people from rebuilding the wall and gates, keep them in *‘great trouble and shame’*

Does this describe your life, or someone you know?

When we begin rebuilding these broken walls and gates, our enemies will come

This is what happened to the Jews under Nehemiah’s leadership, but they discerned the attacks, took them to God in prayer and He responded, and they set a guard and they *‘all returned to the wall each to his work’*

Every one of the faithful builders got back on that wall and *‘each to his work’*

Every Christian is spiritually gifted, and to different measures, for the work God has given us
Your work might be directly in the church, teaching Sunday school or on the worship teams

Or it may be serving in a political sphere, working to bring God's will to bear in our government
Your part of the wall may change in the future: today it's in your school, someday in your career
Your wall right now may be training up your children in righteousness or honoring your aged
parents by caring closely for them

*Here is how one mother in our church is *returning to the wall to her work*

Her family is to the point she can come alongside a mom with several young children to help
take care of the kids and clean the home

*Another lady last evening in the midst of transition is sensing a new season of ministry and is
asking for guidance in what that might be

*We have 2 couples who sense God's call to serve in Africa, and they are preparing for that

*What God is stirring in you is likely the part of the wall He has you to labor at!

*Last night one of our college students asked me about 4 times, how can I serve?

*We have a faithful man with a life-threatening illness, asks me constantly to put him on the wall

*I frequently have parents call me for help with their children who have fallen away from God
I called *Helen VanSumeren* and asked her to prayerfully consider starting a Bible-centered,
Christ-honoring support group for these parents

In typical Helenian manner, she said, 'I've never done this before, but I will pray about it!'

She actually did pray about it and God did assigned her that portion of the wall to build, starting
one support group and will soon start another one

And each of these people have been gifted for that part of the wall, to the exact measure they
need to be to do all God has asked them to do

And as we enter what seems to be lulls in our battle and we return to what God asks us to do,
how do we take care to watch over our lives?

PP 2-We Must Stay on Guard

4:16-23

"From that day on" 16a

PP a) *They stayed vigilant together 4:16a*

"From that day on..." tells us that the Jews realized that from that day on, carelessness was not
an option, peace not a reality, they could never relax their guard

**PP *"Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring
lion, seeking someone to devour."* 1 Peter 5:8**

So Nehemiah made adjustments and they are the same ones we must make

***"...half of my servants worked on construction, and half held the spears, shields, bows, and
coats of mail. And the leaders stood behind the whole house of Judah, who were building on
the wall." 4:16-17a***

He divided the people into two groups: those who were building and those who were guarding
Are we standing guard for our missionaries, praying for them and encouraging them?

Are you praying while the men who preach fill this pulpit?

Are we standing guard over our church, refusing to gossip or slander one another; keeping short
accounts; forgiving each other?

Are you going to be at the fish gate soon visiting unbelieving family?
Who will be standing guard for you in prayer, encouraging you to boldness?

The leaders stood behind the entire people of Judah-note this- ***‘who were building on the wall’***
Not supporting those who refused to serve or who were distracting from the work

PP b) They each carried a sword 4:17b-18a

“Those who carried burdens were loaded in such a way that each labored on the work with one hand and held his weapon with the other. And each of the builders had his sword strapped at his side while he built.” 4:17b-18a

Illus Do you remember hearing of the Minutemen during the American Revolution? Ordinary citizens like farmers, merchants, and bankers, banded together to form an army. When the alarm sounded they would drop their work, grab their muskets, and head into battle. No rummaging through the attic looking for that powder horn, or searching the shed for wadding and shot. They were ready in a minute, always prepared, even while they worked.

We see this in Nehemiah as each person carried a sword, either in their hand or on their side while they worked

This points to the sword of the Spirit we each must have strapped to us, the Word of God
You cannot rely on me, or Sunday school teachers or life group leaders to carry your sword
Each of us must have this sword with us, it is our weapon against spiritual enemies
It is indestructible and always overwhelming to our enemies when wielded right

PP “For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,” 2 Corinthians 10:4-5

None of the Jews went anywhere without a sword

But the wall was long and plenty of places where it couldn’t be adequately guarded
The wall is believed by many to have been either just under 2 or right at 2 ½ miles long
It appears to have had 42 sections averaging 250 feet long
With all this open space, they needed a way to protect the workers

c) They adopted an early warning system 4:18-20

“The man who sounded the trumpet was beside me. And I said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, “The work is great and widely spread, and we are separated on the wall, far from one another. In the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us.”

Illus In 1984, an Avianca Airlines jet plowed into the side of a mountain, killing all on board. The recovered black box revealed that several minutes before impact, the English speaking, computer-synthesized voice from the plane's Ground Proximity Warning System told the crew repeatedly, "Pull up! Pull up!" The pilot, evidently thinking the system was malfunctioning, responded, "Shut up, Gringo!" and switched the system off.

PP *“The trumpets shall be to you for a perpetual statute throughout your generations. And when you go to war in your land against the adversary who oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, that you may be remembered before the LORD your God, and you shall be saved from your enemies.”* Numbers 10:8-9

The word *‘trumpet’* here is the Hebrew word Shophar, a ram’s horn capable of producing only one or two notes
It was used to call God’s people together

Many of us *‘are separated on the wall, far from one another’*, busy at our jobs or in our homes
Your Christian friends may be back home and none at your college
My question is: Who is your trumpet blower to rally people to your side?

The trumpet stayed with Nehemiah, as leadership must be watchmen caring for the people
*A friend of mine is going through some terribly difficult times, and three of us periodically have breakfast with him to encourage him, so he can stand firm against discouragement
Are your ears trained to hear that trumpet and when you hear it, do you respond immediately?
And when the trumpet blows, we rally with full assurance that *“Our God will fight for us”*

PP d) *They all worked, all day* 4:21

“So we labored at the work, and half of them held the spears from the break of dawn until the stars came out.” 4:21

Their day spanned from sundown to sundown, patterned after their interpretation of God’s activity in creation, *“there was evening and there was morning, the first day”*
For us, tomorrow begins when our clocks hit midnight
Their new day started at sundown when the first three stars appeared in the night sky, which occurs a little time after darkness settles on the land

PP And in this we see the principle for us: *“exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”* Heb. 3:13

The Morning Star, Jesus Christ, is coming soon, to bring us into our eternal rest
Our rest is coming and it will be infinitely rewarding, but now is the time to build the kingdom

PP e) *They stayed together in fellowship* 4:22

“I also said to the people at that time, ‘Let every man and his servant pass the night within Jerusalem, that they may be a guard for us by night and may labor by day.’” 4:22

The pattern of our enemy is to *isolate the Christian from his/her church family*

When we struggle with sin and get discouraged...who is blowing the trumpet for us?

No one will understand what I am struggling with

When our lives get busy and we fall out of the habit of worshiping together...where is the trumpet blower alerting you to the world’s attack?

There is a measure of safety within biblical fellowship

When we pull together within Jerusalem, which represents the church for us, and live life together, our enemies will have a much more difficult time with their strategie

PP f) And finally, they kept their clothes on

“So neither I nor my brothers nor my servants nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us took off our clothes; each kept his weapon at his right hand.” 4:23

This is an incredibly strong form of emphasizing what Nehemiah thinks is important
Immediately, what comes to the mind is that they stayed alert, ready for a night-time attack
They didn’t want to be caught with their pants down...crude, but true
But there seems to me to be a deeper principle of building and battling here
Building the wall and repairing the gates refers to our spiritual growth
We are being made ready, but ready for what?

One day there will be a great wedding in eternity between Christ and the Church

PP “Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure”— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.” Rev. 19:9-10

Our enemies won’t be around to crash that wedding, but they are doing all they can to prevent
the bride, the church, from making herself ready for her wedding day
In this life on earth we are getting ready for that great day!
Never relaxing or taking a vacation on spiritual growth
Every sin is serious, no matter how seemingly small it is
Every step of obedience is important, no matter how hard it might be
We dress in ***‘the righteous deeds of the saints’*** is by keeping the Word of God at our right hand

PP Every day, we build and battle, always keeping hold of the Sword of the Spirit

Listening for the trumpet to blow and responding immediately
Laboring for God with all our might while it is yet the day, serving together by day, protecting
each other when dark times come
Making the church ready for the great wedding day!