

“Our God will fight for us!”
Building for the Glory of God
Nehemiah 4:1-23
25th February 2024
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In the year 1865, Charles Spurgeon began editing a magazine to encourage Christians. He called the magazine, the “Sword and Trowel” which he got from Nehemiah chapter 4, the Scripture reading for today. The people building the walls of Jerusalem with trowel in one hand, had to arm themselves with a sword in the other, because of their enemies.

“Sword and Trowel”

As we sit here this morning, a vast invisible battle is going on in the heavenlies, between the kingdom of God and the dominion of darkness. A battle between God and Satan, truth and error, between righteousness and wickedness. *“Our struggle is against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” (Ephesians 6:12)*

The people of God individually, each one of us, and every true church in the world - we are all engaged in this titanic invisible battle.

The good news is that God’s people are on Victory’s side! Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Satan is a defeated enemy:

“I saw Satan fall from the skies” (Luke 10:18)

“the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.” (1 John 4:4)

“Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power” (Ephesians 6:10)

“The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.” (Romans 16:20)

*“The devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of burning sulphur...”
(Revelation 20:10)*

*And though this world, with devils filled,
should threaten to undo us,
we will not fear, for God has willed
his truth to triumph through us.
The prince of darkness grim,
we tremble not for him;
his rage we can endure,
for lo! his doom is sure;
one little word shall fell him.*

That’s the good news! Christ’s victory is certain, and so with him is ours!

Does some battle-scarred saint need to hear that this morning? You find yourself in the heat of a seemingly unwinnable battle, perhaps unknown by anyone else in the world: against fear or doubt or temptation? And there are days you wonder what the outcome will be: Will you stand or will you fall? Well, “The Lord is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy!” (Jude 24)

Good news! We shall triumph! The *bad news*, if I can put it that way, is that in this world *we must fight* the good fight. Against the old sinful nature! Against doubt and fear! Against error and lies! Against temptation! That’s what we learn from Nehemiah chapter 4. And we learn how to fight the good fight.

The Story in Nehemiah

If you are new to us, we’ve been making our way through the book of Nehemiah on Sunday mornings. From the very start of the rebuilding of the walls, the people of God have faced enemies. Sanballat, the ringleader, and his sidekick Tobiah, showed up the very moment Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem. “...*they were very much disturbed that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites.*” (2:10) Before long they were joined by Geshem the Arab, and now, 4:7 a fourth enemy—“the men of Ashdod.”

As the rebuilding progressed, the opposition increased, and now Jerusalem is surrounded. As you grow in your faith, Satan's attempts to trip you up will increase, are you aware of that? The Lord wraps baby Christians in divine cotton wool, but as you grow into spiritual adulthood, he allows you feel more of the heat, to teach you to put on the full armour of God. And as a church's efforts to share the Gospel further increases, so Satan's attacks will intensify. I want to warn MPC, that as we seek to reach out with the Gospel to children, to youth, to students and to Malvern, we must expect opposition. Nehemiah's enemies have multiplied from 2 to 4!

We learn from chapter 4 is that Satan attacks God's people in two different ways, opposition comes from outside, opposition comes from inside. Both have the same aim—to stop the work! But the opposition from outside is designed to instil fear, while the opposition from within and is aimed at spreading discouragement. Let's start with.....

Satanic Opposition from outside—fear

“When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall he became very angry and greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said “What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble—burned as they are?” (4:1-2)

Then Tobiah pipes up:

“What they are building—if even a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones!”

By mocking the workers in front of the army, they're hoping to instil fear so that the people stop building. How did Nehemiah respond?

First he prayed, and then he kept on building! Have we all got that? Nehemiah prayed and kept on building! Prayer without work is presumption, and work without prayer is self-reliance. For unless the Lord builds the house, the labourers work in vain. Do you and I pray about all the walls we are called to build? Marriage? Parenting? Witness in neighbourhood and work place?

“Hear us, O our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from your sight, for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders.”

We may question Nehemiah’s prayer in the light of the words of Jesus to love our enemies, but let’s be careful not judge a man filled with a holy zeal for the Kingdom of God that far outstrips our own. God’s shoulders are broad enough to handle the difficult prayers of his people.

Nehemiah prayed and kept building, “So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height.. for the people worked with all their heart.” Isn’t that a beautiful comment Nehemiah throws in? “The people worked with all their heart.” Would an onlooker say that about your labour and mine? “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward.” (Colossians 3:23-24) Some Christians read zeal as fanaticism because they themselves are so half-hearted and luke-warm. Jesus made a whip and drove the money changers out of the temple because zeal for God’s house consumed him. (John 2)

The people’s zeal riled the enemies into rage and thus began round 2 of the opposition. “When the enemies “heard that repairs to Jerusalem’s walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry. They plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it.” (7-8)

Mockery had failed, it was time to stop the worker by force. What did Nehemiah do? The same as he did, round 1, he prayed and kept on building. But this time he added a new element, he posted a guard to watch out. *“We prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat” (verse 9)*

When the enemy attacks from outside, Nehemiah prays and builds. But now he adds a new dimension—watchfulness. Can I say to the elders here at MPC, one of our roles is to guard the flock against false teaching, against wolves. Let us be ever vigilant in that task. Not just elders, but all of us.

When Satan could not stop the work from outside he attacked from inside.

Satanic opposition from inside—discouragement

Some of the workers had not put on the breastplate of righteousness, some had left their shields of faith at home, so the stinging insults of Sanballat and Tobiah found their way into their heads and hearts. In round three, Satan spread discouragement among the ranks of workers: “The people in Judah said, “The strength of the labourers is giving out and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall.” (verse 11) Some of the workers believed the threat: “Before they see it or see us, we will be right there among them and will kill them and put an end to the work.” (11)

Other workers complained to Nehemiah ten times over! “Wherever we turn, they will attack us.” (12)

Let us be known as bright encouragers, brothers and sisters, not discouragers.

Nehemiah knew that he had to do something about this discouragement. He posted families armed to the teeth at the most vulnerable parts of the wall (verse 13) and then gave them all a pep talk: “Don’t be afraid of them. Remember the Lord who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.”

When the enemy discovered that God had frustrated their plot to attack the city, and that the builders were armed to the teeth, the enemies withdrew and the builders were able to return to their previous places and stations, verse 15.

I was watching a documentary about some of the dangerous dogs people invite into their homes, and one commentator said that when some breeds attack they will not give up until the victim is dead - or the dog is destroyed. Satan is like that. He keeps on attacking until one day he will be destroyed. Nehemiah knew the enemy would return, so he put serious security measures in place.

- Half of the people worked, while the other dressed for war, equipped with spears, shields, bows and armour. (verse 16)

- But even the workers also carried a weapon, “Sword and Trowel”? Remember? (17-18)
- Nehemiah set up a Whatsapp group to warn everyone about an approaching army. Whatsapp was called “trumpet” in those days, v.18-19). “Whenever you hear the sound of the trumpet join us there. Our God will fight for us!”
Nehemiah’s confidence was in God.
- From now on, everyone had to live within the walls of the city (verse 22)
- To ensure constant vigilance, no-one changed into their PJs at night (verse 23)
- And wherever they went—even when they went to fetch water—everyone carried a weapon (verse 23)

Nehemiah wasn’t paralysed by fear. He kept on building! He kept on praying! And he began watching!

It’s time to apply this to the church.

Application

The church is not building a wall, no our calling is to make disciples of all nations: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matthew 28

These are the walls we are called to build! And in our day Satan is doing everything he can to prevent us from building certain walls of God’s Jerusalem:

Satan does not want us to build the wall of Gospel repentance. You will know that in the houses of parliament there are moves afoot to stop Christians from preaching repentance. Under the guise of a “conversion therapy bill” Christians will be forbidden to preach repentance from certain fashionable sins.

Satan does not want us to build the wall of Gospel faith in Christ as the unique Son of God and the only Saviour of the world.

Satan does not want us to build the wall of godly family life, with mothers and fathers, not the state, responsible for what they teach their children

Satan does not want us to build the wall of complementarianism, the Biblical view that while men and women are equal in God's eyes there is a divine order between men and women which must be seen in marriage and in the church.

What shall we do? Give in to the enemy? Stop preaching the Gospel? Adapt the message so that it is palatable to the world? Many churches and denominations are doing just that: compromising the Gospel to fit in with the world.

But what shall we do? We learn from Nehemiah chapter 4, that we must, and I leave you with this:

1. Pray without ceasing

That's what Nehemiah did, 'Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.' (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Pray in our homes, Husbands and wives do you pray together? Pray in our home groups, Pray across our monthly week of prayer.

2. Build wholeheartedly

"So we continued the work" (verse 21). We must continue building the walls of repentance and faith, and with all our hearts! And finally,

3. Watch constantly, putting on the whole armour of God

Nehemiah had guards constantly on the look out, "*Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*" (1 Peter 5:8)

I'm reading a book about the story of disease in the course of human history. "Plagues Upon the earth" by Kyle Harper, "*Eternal vigilance is the price of liberation from infectious disease*" (p 3). We must be on our guard every moment of the day, against the schemes of the evil one.

Victory is Certain

Brothers and sisters victory is certain, not only because God will fight for us, but because 2000 years ago all the hosts of hell gathered to attack heaven's Messiah. They thought that by crucifying him they had destroyed him, but on the third day he rose triumphantly from the dead! And we, his beloved children share in that glorious victory. Praise God. Amen.