

**REBUILDING A LIFE FOR GOD - Studies In Nehemiah - Part eleven  
Sunday, November 26<sup>th</sup>, 2023, 5:30 p.m.  
Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON**

### **HOW TO KEEP THE JOY OF YOUR CALLING (continued)**

**Nehemiah 6:1-14 - “ Now when Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies heard that I had built the wall and that there was no breach left in it (although up to that time I had not set up the doors in the gates), [2] Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, “Come and let us meet together at Hakkephirim in the plain of Ono.” But they intended to do me harm. [3] And I sent messengers to them, saying, “I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?” [4] And they sent to me four times in this way, and I answered them in the same manner. [5] In the same way Sanballat for the fifth time sent his servant to me with an open letter in his hand. [6] In it was written, “It is reported among the nations, and Geshem also says it, that you and the Jews intend to rebel; that is why you are building the wall. And according to these reports you wish to become their king. [7] And you have also set up prophets to proclaim concerning you in Jerusalem, ‘There is a king in Judah.’ And now the king will hear of these reports. So now come and let us take counsel together.” [8] Then I sent to him, saying, “No such things as you say have been done, for you are inventing them out of your own mind.” [9] 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. [10] Now when I went into the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel, who was confined to his home, he said, “Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple. Let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you. They are coming to kill you by night.” [11] But I said, “Should such a man as I run away? And what man such as I could go into the temple and live? I will not go in.”**

[12] “And I understood and saw that God had not sent him, but he had pronounced the prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. [13] For this purpose he was hired, that I should be afraid and act in this way and sin, and so they could give me a bad name in order to taunt me. [14] Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, according to these things that they did, and also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who wanted to make me afraid.”

Last week we started looking at the three tactics of the enemy to pull Nehemiah from the completion of the wall. Nehemiah was **called** by God to complete this task. There was a sense of **mission** and **importance** and **assignment** to what he was doing. And, as we saw last week, whenever God **calls** Satan **obstructs**.

The three tactics used with Nehemiah were **distraction**, **slander** and **fear**. These same three tactics are repeated over and over again throughout the body of Christ today. If you lead, you will experience them. If you are going to lead anything for the Lord you will have to chew these three things up every day and know how to digest them. They will never go away.

The **distraction** came as these leaders urged Nehemiah to come down from the wall to meet for meetings and discussions. Our text says they hounded Nehemiah **four times** to do this. They weren't really interested in making peace with Nehemiah. They just wanted him to **stop his work on the wall**. The lesson here is the joy of your calling isn't just threatened by **glaring sins**, but also by **trivial distractions**. These little things are what my father-in-law calls "flies in your nose." They aren't designed to kill you. They just keep you from concentrating on what you're doing.

But Nehemiah knew the hearts of his critics. He saw through their plan. His response in **verse 3** is marvellous: **"And I sent messengers to them, saying, 'I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?'"**

Nehemiah's dedication to his assignment kept him fruitful and on track. He knew their empty words. He is driven by a sense of missions. The lesson is, never leave something **important** for something **fruitless**. Nehemiah wasn't being **loveless**. He was being **discerning**. If you're going to lead, shun distractions. Live in the glow of your calling.

Now for the second tactic of the enemy:

- b) **SLANDER - Nehemiah 6:5-9** - “In the same way Sanballat for the fifth time sent his servant to me with an open letter in his hand. [6] In it was written, “It is reported among the nations, and Geshem also says it, that you and the Jews intend to rebel; that is why you are building the wall. And according to these reports you wish to become their king. [7] And you have also set up prophets to proclaim concerning you in Jerusalem, ‘There is a king in Judah.’ And now the king will hear of these reports. So now come and let us take counsel together. [8] Then I sent to him, saying, “No such things as you say have been done, for you are inventing them out of your own mind.” [9] 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.

Notice from **verse five** that these words come in an “***open letter.***” The NIV translates it literally as an “**unsealed letter.**” The soft seal on the outside of the letter or parchment was a way of identifying the author of the document. It named the ***source*** of what was enclosed. And it also ***kept the contents private***, viewable only by the intended receiver of the letter.

But according to our text, this was an **open** letter. That means two things: It was what we would call an **unsigned** letter. The author maintained his anonymity. It also means this was a letter for **proclamation**. It was read publicly. It's contents were designed for **distribution among the masses**.

Notice also that its source is never really directly quoted: **"It is reported among the nations..."(6a)**, and **"....according to these reports..."(6b)**.

Who is doing this reporting? According to whose reports? No one knew. There was nothing here anyone could really put a finger on. There was no one to respond to. To this day I constantly remember my father's advice when I entered the ministry not to read unsigned letters. I never have.

This is always the road of gossip and rumour. It's **designed for distribution** and **the source is never quoted**. Perhaps Nehemiah could track down all the sources. But that would take a tremendous amount of time and effort. And he knows that's exactly what the enemy wants. **Nehemiah knows that while he's embroiled in witch hunting, the walls won't be going up.**

He is wise enough to ***keep his attention on the big picture.*** ***He is more concerned about the walls than he is about his own reputation!*** There's another important life lesson: ***God can't do anything with a person committed to defending his own rights.*** If you're committed to protecting your own rights, you will never amount to anything in the Kingdom of God.

Consider **Romans 12:17-21** - **“Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. [18] If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. [19] Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” [20] To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” [21] Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”**

Why is this Paul's emphasis in a chapter dealing with using spiritual gifts in service to the body of Christ? Because this is the enemy's most fruitful tactic for keeping gifted people fruitless and barren in the church.

Perhaps that's the key here. Nehemiah is not a **selfish** leader. He has bigger issues to consider than his own reputation. It would have been so easy for Nehemiah to justify some form of vengeance - "***What these people are doing isn't right.***" Or here's the more spiritual sounding approach: "***If they do this to me, they'll do it to someone else. I owe it to others to hunt this down and expose this injustice!***" Doesn't *that* sound spiritual?

Listen, if you're leading anything at all, or if you're going anywhere at all, you will have enemies. And know this for sure - **Christian** enemies are just like **pagan** enemies. They talk and then they hide. You will, sooner or later, be slandered if you lead anything in God's Kingdom.

Determine now to do what Nehemiah did. Take the matter to God - **verse 9** - "***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.***"

Don't get embroiled in a fight. But don't quit on your calling. Stay close to God in prayer. Leave your rights with God. And stay with your calling.

“Well, Pastor Don, I don’t think I should have to take that kind of abuse. I never signed up for that.”

Actually, you did. ***You repeatedly make a vow to take that kind of abuse, without retaliation, every time you come to the communion table:***

**1 Peter 2:21-23 - “For to this you have been called,**  
**because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an**  
**example, so that you might follow in his steps. [22] He**  
**committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.**  
**[23] When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when**  
**he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting**  
**himself to him who judges justly.”**

Notice those words, “**For th this you have been called....**”  
This is what you signed up for when you were saved. ***This comes with salvation as a lifestyle.*** It’s not optional. When you come to the cross you give up the right to defend yourself!

You can’t follow Jesus and spend your time defending yourself against those who wrong you. The path of the cross does not give you the option of self-defence. Leave your enemies with God. If your reputation doesn’t defend you, your words are useless anyway.



- c) **FEAR - Nehemiah 6:10-14** - “Now when I went into the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel, who was confined to his home, he said, “Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple. Let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you. They are coming to kill you by night.” [11] But I said, “Should such a man as I run away? And what man such as I could go into the temple and live? I will not go in.” [12] And I understood and saw that God had not sent him, but he had pronounced the prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. [13] For this purpose he was hired, that I should be afraid and act in this way and sin, and so they could give me a bad name in order to taunt me. [14] Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, according to these things that they did, and also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who wanted to make me afraid.”

The devil is not above using religious means to confuse and muddy your life. Nothing else had worked to derail Nehemiah, so up to the front of the line come these people with - what else - a prophecy.

Question: ***How did Nehemiah know this message was not of the Lord?*** Was it that God had gifted him with unusual discernment? Did some angel come and tell Nehemiah not to listen to these people?

I suppose both of those things ***could*** have happened. But in this situation neither one was the case. Nehemiah knew this was not of the Lord ***by two means that are open and available to all of us in work for our Lord:***

- i) ***He knew that it was wrong for him, or anyone not of the priesthood, to enter the doors of the temple.*** This was not just coming into the temple ***courtyard***, where all could come to worship. This was a meeting ***inside the area reserved for the priesthood itself.***

How did Nehemiah know this? Simply because ***he read and knew the laws of God.*** Because his life was grounded in God's Word, he was spared incredible ruin and he saw through the plan of his enemies.

The psalmist urges all of us, over and over again, to discover the secret of having life secured and made safe by the law of God:

**Psalms 119:92-93** - “If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction. [93] I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have given me life.”

**Psalm 119:165** - “Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble.”

**Psalm 119:174-175** - “I long for your salvation, O LORD, and your law is my delight. [175] Let my soul live and praise you, and let your rules help me.”

Did you catch the power of those words? We need fresh eyes to appreciate the *glory* of God’s law. Otherwise we will only see the law of God with the eyes of *duty*. This is why the Psalmist constantly prayed for divine wisdom to see the law of God aright: **Psalm 119:18** - “Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.”

So this is the first thing that tipped Nehemiah off as to the invalid nature of this prophecy. I said there were *two* clues for Nehemiah to rely on. Here’s the second:

- ii) ***He knew God had called him to build the wall and he knew this activity would hinder that work.*** Look at **verse 11** - **“Should such a man as I flee?”**

Those words need some explanation. They are not some proud, arrogant boasts - “Look at me! Look at the great role I have here!” No, that’s not the meaning at all. Rather, here’s what Nehemiah is saying here: “That’s not why I’m here. That’s not my calling. That’s not my job. What does all of this intrigue and espionage have to do with building the walls. This is not for me. I know **who** has called me, and I know **why** I am here. Should such a man as I - a called man, with an assignment from God, with so much invested in this situation - should such a man as I flee?”

Keep your life focussed on what God has for you to do. Never lose sight of that day of judgement and reward. That’s what **verse 14** is all about: **“Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, according to these things that they did, and also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who wanted to make me afraid.”**

God will keep track of all the injustices in this life. God will reward and punish. That's not my job. This is a great part of getting a heart of wisdom: It is **God's** job to look after my rights. It is never **my** job to look after them. Leave the maintaining of personal justice with your heavenly Father. More ministries are ruined by the way leaders **respond** to injustice than by anything else. This is true of **all** levels of Christian ministry. Stay glued to the heart of your calling. Leave personal vengeance with God:

**Romans 12:17-19 - "Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. [18] If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. [19] Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."**

There is a day of universal judgment coming. All the scores will be accurately kept. But until that day, **what is your calling?** Do you know? How faithful are you to the ministry God has given you? How's your distinct witness of patience and faithfulness to the Lord? Are you getting all gummed up in anger, frustration, or worse - retaliation?

Make no mistake about it. Every Christian must live life with a sense of **calling**. Don't just drift and go to church. Your calling is what makes you **strong**. Your calling is what makes you **safe**. Your calling is what gives you **joy**. Don't get sidetracked.