

REBUILDING A HOPE-FILLED FUTURE FROM THE RUBBLE OF YOUR PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES - Studies In Nehemiah - Part four

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REBUILDING YOUR LIFE IN THE FACE OF OPPOSITION

Nehemiah 4:1-9 - "Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged, and he jeered at the Jews. [2] And he said in the presence of his brothers and of the army of Samaria, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore it for themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish up in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, and burned ones at that?" [3] Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, "Yes, what they are building— if a fox goes up on it he will break down their stone wall!" [4] Hear, O our God, for we are despised. Turn back their taunt on their own heads and give them up to be plundered in a land where they are captives. [5] Do not cover their guilt, and let not their sin be blotted out from your sight, for they have provoked you to anger in the presence of the builders. [6] So we built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work. [7] But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and that the breaches were beginning to be closed, they were very angry. [8] And they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it. [9] And we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection against them day and night."

The key lesson in today's message is a simple one: No sooner does Nehemiah set his hand to the specific task of rebuilding the walls, but *he encounters specific forces designed to discourage and impede the construction process*. He had prayed. He had prepared. He had organized. He had made a good start. *Not until the walls actually started to go up did the opposing voices make themselves heard.*

Notice the anger in the remarks of these people:

Verse 1 - "Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged, and he jeered at the Jews."

Verse 3 - "Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, "Yes, what they are building— if a fox goes up on it he will break down their stone wall!"

Verse 7 - "But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and that the breaches were beginning to be closed, they were very angry."

I think we are all aware of the fact that we are involved with more than just the visible realm when we undertake any advancement in the Kingdom of God. I think we all know our Bibles well enough to know Paul's words about our "*struggle not being with flesh and blood*" and the need to "*stand against the enemy.*"

But there's something more in these verses. It's not enough to know there is an enemy. It's not enough to know that there is opposition to all that the Spirit of God wants to do in your life. The point of these verses is that *these voices are not silent. They speak to your heart and your mind, but only once you're committed to the Spirit's rebuilding work in your life.*

Paul faced the same thing in his own life: **2 Corinthians 10:3-5** - "For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. [4] For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. [5] We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ...."

Notice the nature of the enemy in these verses: "*strongholds*" (4), "*arguments*" (5), and "*opinions*" (5). How many Christians are unaware of the assault of the enemy on their mind through the words of others and the values of the spirit of this age. That's what Paul is writing about in these verses. *He's talking about the enemy's ability to infiltrate your resolve - your commitment - your confidence in what the Holy Spirit wants to do in and through your life.*

This is the enemy's most sinister work because it's so hard to trace. *You usually just end up blaming yourself.* It's very easy to allow the enemy's belittling accusations to find a lodging place in your mind under the guise of *humility*, or *self-abasement* of some form.

Or, worse still, you can end up *blaming God* for things He's had nothing to do with. You begin to confuse the source of the accusations in your mind: "*Boy, God's hard to please. If my conscience is His voice, why is He constantly running me down? He never seems satisfied with anything I do. He's always telling me I'm no good!*"

Look at what happened with these people as they worked on the walls. You've had it happen in your life too. There you are, doing your best, working hard, serving the Lord, going to church, praying, reading your Bible, caring for the poor and trying to love your enemies.

Then suddenly these kinds of thoughts start to just come, as if they had a life of their own:

1) **"WHAT ARE THESE FEEBLE JEWS DOING?... WILL THEY RESTORE IT FOR THEMSELVES?"** (2)

"Look at how weak you are!" - "*feeble*" - "You're going to try to fix your situation? You don't have what it takes to make things right. You'll never make it in a million years!"

And I want to say these words to every Christian in this room. Every Christian will hear those words a million times in his or her Christian walk: ***"You're going to pray for that situation?" "You're going to try to put that marriage back together?" "You're going to try to give how much to world missions this year?" "You think God's going to heal you of that sickness?"***

The **timing** of these thoughts is never accidental. The enemy picks such critical times to do his work. ***The Jews had made a start. They had determined in their hearts to begin the rebuilding work. Morale was high. But while they had started the work, they hadn't yet finished.***

That's a very important point. Because the work wasn't finished yet there was still ***plenty of rubble to point at and say, "See, look at all that mess. You're in terrible shape! Look at all the work to be done. You're never going to get all this done!"***

Nothing is easier to poke fun at than a great work not yet completed. Nothing is easier to get ***discouraged*** about than something begun, but still a long way from completion. And because of this, nothing is easier for the devil to do than to assess your life at the ***beginning*** of a rebuilding situation, and make you feel guilty because it doesn't look the way God wants it to look at the ***completion*** of the project.

He always picks just the right time to enter the recesses of your mind and whisper, ***"You're a crummy parent" - "A good husband would never treat his wife like that" - "You don't understand the Word as well as so and so" - "Look at all those habits that are still present in your life."***

And what the Holy Spirit wants to say to you this morning is simply this, ***"Listen, all of those accusations may still be true. But just listening to them is not going to get the building job done. And you will live your life spinning your tires if you're going to stop and argue about your sins with the Devil when God wants to get on with the job of rebuilding your life!"***

Centuries ago ***Martin Luther*** wisely said we should ***only talk to Jesus about our sins***. There is no future in any conversations with the Devil.

Notice something else in ***verse 4*** - ***"Hear, O our God, for we are despised. Turn back their taunt on their own heads and give them up to be plundered in a land where they are captives."***

Nehemiah goes to ***God*** when he's persecuted. He's not going to stop to argue with his enemies. He knows he has letters from the King. He knows he has the authority of Artixerxes behind his actions. Rather than waste valuable building time arguing with these critics, he has the good sense to take the matter to God and leave it with Him.

This is one of the highest, yet ignored expressions of faith we can ever manifest. Can you trust God to deal with those who wrong you?

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.'"***

Don't waste building time scrapping with your critics and enemies. And don't let their accusations rob you of confidence in God: ***Philippians 1:6*** - ***"And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."***

Do you see what that means? We should all take great encouragement from these words. God didn't take you on because he thought you were in pretty good shape to start with. And He's not discouraged because it's a long job. ***He knew He'd be working on you until Jesus comes again. And He's committed to the work until that day!***

Look at the next accusation levelled against these wall-builders:

2) ***"WILL THEY SACRIFICE?"(2)***

This is a very key point. Nothing was as crucial or more central to Old Testament worship than the offering of sacrifices to God. ***That's because, in God's plan, nothing was more central to His presence among His people than the forgiving of their sins.*** Sin always separates us from God. Sin has to be dealt with before anything else good can happen in our lives. The sacrifices pointed to Jesus and His cross. They pointed to the way of ***restored joyful fellowship with a holy God.***

Purity. Fellowship. Worship. That's what the sacrifices were all about. And that is why they were ***then***, and continue to be ***now***, the central issue of the enemy's attack. He can't stand the power of ***grace*** in the believer's mind and heart: ***"Do you really think you're going to be clean before God? Look at what you have done! If you were God would you forgive YOU after all the times you've failed in the very same area over and over again?"***

It's not so much that he sows doubt about the truth of the divinity of Jesus, or the fact that people can be saved by putting their trust in Him. Those are theological truths that are so well established in the Word, and in human experience, it's hard to deny them.

Rather, he leads you to doubt the continuous power - the lingering power of the blood of Jesus in your life in 2013. It's the power of forgiveness **today** that he wants to wipe out of your heart. And the whole purpose of the attack is to **keep you from making approach to the throne of God in powerful prayer and worship.**

This attack of the Devil is the single reason for the striking, hard-hitting reminder from the writer of the book of Hebrews: **Hebrews 4:16** - **"Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."**

The wording of that verse shows the writer's intention isn't only to tell us there **is**, in fact, a throne of grace. His point isn't even just to tell us to **come** there. The writer is striving to tell us **how** to come. There is a kind of attitude and mind-set that is necessary if we are to **continue** coming, even in the face of ongoing rebuffs of the Devil.

"You must come with confidence!" The KJV says you must come **"boldly."** Why? Because any other kind of approach is insulting to Father God. Any other approach will **wear out over time** as the Devil wars against all of your best spiritual intentions.

The devil **hates** a confident approach to God for grace. He has no weapon against that. That's why he wants to sap your mind of joy in coming before the Lord **today** - this evening, as we gather in His house. He doesn't mind you being in church, but he wants you, **by a thousand different accusations and distractions, to be prevented from joyful adoration and an actual participation in the reception of powerful grace from the Cross of Jesus Christ!**

Plan on the enemy's whispers. Every time you approach God, get ready to hear, **"You're going to worship God? You? Look at your life! Look at your sin! Better just sit near a door and sing quietly."**

How different is the encouragement of the Word of God: **Hebrews 10:19-23** - **"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, [20] by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, [21] and since we have a great priest over the house of God, [22] let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. [23] Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful."**

3) **"WILL THEY FINISH UP IN A DAY?"(2)**

What is the answer to that question? Well, no. Of course not. The job will **never** be done in a day. **And it's not a bad thing for me to remind myself of that.** This attack shows that the enemy can do real damage in my life through my own ignorance.

The work won't be done in one service. The work won't be done at one retreat, or camp meeting. One book or CD or podcast isn't going to get the whole job done. One counsellor won't solve all my problems.

We already looked at **Philippians 1:6** - **"And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."**

Please notice that the work is now only a work **begun**. The accomplishment of **forgiveness** is **complete**. But the reconstructing work of sanctification is **begun**. And God graciously **reminds** us all of that fact. But as surely as it's begun, it will be **finished** as I keep my trust in the Lord and my heart committed to His ways.

This is never an excuse for **laziness** or **indifference** toward the sins that grieve the Holy Spirit. Not at all. Rather, this understanding of the long haul is so you can set yourself to work with **persistent effort over the long stretch**. There's no room for laziness or spiritual slackness. We must keep pressing hard every day. Follow Jesus with patience. Always give God the benefit of the doubt when you don't fully agree or understand. Never quit just because the Devil tells you to.

Let me close with a wonderful piece of advice from this story from Nehemiah:

4) **GO TO GOD AND POST A GUARD** **Nehemiah 4:9 - "And we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection against them day and night."**

I know some today would call that a lack of faith, but I love it. I can't fully explain it, but there's something about that verse I just relate to. It's good to pray and seek the face of God. **But are you also alert for the tactics and voice of the enemy?** Notice, I didn't say we should listen **to** the voice of the enemy. I said we should listen **for** the voice of the enemy. Paul wrote about this in his letter to the church at Corinth:

2 Corinthians 2:10-11 - **"Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. What I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, [11] so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs."**

Know what the enemy is trying to do as you build your life in Christ. He will seek to establish deception and discouragement in your own mind. Remember, since the Cross, the Devil's **only** power over your life is his ability to **deceive you into believing his lies**. He cannot touch your inner life **directly**. His destructive work collapses as you walk in the truth. Know the truth and he's powerless. Learn to separate your

own thoughts from his. This is crucial. He will try to work in your thoughts so you don't even think he's present. Like a good burglar, he'll try to steal the precious rebuilding work of the Holy Spirit in your soul.

So, whatever else you do or don't do right, ***don't work with the enemy to create your own problems***. Expect the enemy's opposition to every rebuilding project in your soul. Be like Nehemiah. Don't just ***pray***. Set a ***guard***. Know the truth. Live life in the freedom of obedience to the Holy Spirit. Never forget God's enabling grace. That way you'll never give the Devil's lies a chance.