

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

Sunday, October 13th, 2013, 6:00 p.m. - Teaching #1680

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THE WAY OF GOD IN DISCOURAGING TIMES

Nehemiah 4:10-23 - "In Judah it was said, "The strength of those who bear the burdens is failing. There is too much rubble. By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall." [11] And our enemies said, "They will not know or see till we come among them and kill them and stop the work." [12] At that time the Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said to us ten times, "You must return to us." [13] So in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in open places, I stationed the people by their clans, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. [14] And I looked and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes." [15] When our enemies heard that it was known to us and that God had frustrated their plan, we all returned to the wall, each to his work. [16] From that day on, 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, [17] who were building on the wall. 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. [18] And each of the builders had his sword strapped at his side while he built. The man who sounded the trumpet was beside me. [19] 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. [20] In the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us." [21] So we labored at the work, and half of them held the spears from the break of dawn until the stars came out. [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." [23] 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."

Notice the contrast between **verse 6** and **verse 10**:

Nehemiah 4:6 - "So we built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work."

Nehemiah 4:10 - "In Judah it was said, "The strength of those who bear the burdens is failing. There is too much rubble. By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall."

Now, there's quite a difference in attitude described in those two verses, "**the people had a mind to work (6)**," and "**the strength of those who bear the burden is failing....by we ourselves we are not able to rebuild the wall**"(10). Something begins to happen in the hearts of this group of people as they rebuild their wall, and **as they rebuild their lives**.

Actually, the text says several things happened at once:

1) **FIRST, THERE WAS A LOSS OF STRENGTH**

Nehemiah 4:10 - "The strength of those who bear the burden is failing"

Notice that their strength was failing at a particular time - **verse 6** - "**....all the wall was joined together to half its height....**"

Don't rush over that sentence. Remember the study from last Sunday. There's a certain point at which spiritual labour is exactly like any other labour. In any task there comes a particular point where you are more prone to fatigue - **to loss of strength** - than you will be at any other point.

There is a certain type of weariness - frustration - that sets into anything you do when it's only **half way completed**. The enemy knows this. This is the best time to orchestrate set backs, to arrange opposition, to try to wear you down.

When you're half way done, **you're far enough into the project that the initial thrill is worn off**, yet, **not quite far enough down the road to see the end in sight**. That's the toughest part of the whole task. The middle stretch is the discipline stretch. It's the lack of motivation stretch. It's the thrill-less stretch. It's **away from the crowds at the starting gate, but not within the cheers of the finish line**.

Listen, it's important that we understand this stretch of the rebuilding process. It's important that we know how to run this leg of the race because that's where much of our race for the Lord has to be run.

There are so many every day illustrations of this **middle of the race** principle. When does a new car lose its "newness"? About half way before it's paid for. It's not as exciting as when you first drove it into your driveway. It doesn't have that "new car smell." It may have some dents in the door from being parked at the mall. But it still has to be paid for.

Perhaps you've done some **redecorating**. I suppose for some it's exciting to shop and read the magazines. It's fun to plan and organize and picture what it's all going to look like when it's done. But it's a pain in the neck when the house is a mess. You can't eat in your half-renovated kitchen. Dust gets into all the carpets and furniture.

Or what about that fun filled trip with the kids? It's fun to get the maps out. Fun to talk about the hotels or swimming pools. Great to have

that first meal on the road in a nice restaurant. But after a couple of days on the road, you know what you're going to hear from the back seat - **"Are we almost there yet?"**

No doubt about it. Half way through anything is a discouraging time. It's when we usually **become aware of our loss of strength**. Almost any task is larger than you anticipated at first. Mid-way is the point where we discover this.

2) THERE WAS ALSO A LOSS OF VISION

Nehemiah 4:10 - "In Judah it was said, **"The strength of those who bear the burdens is failing. There is too much rubble. By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall."**

Your heart goes out to these dear people. Can't you hear their voices? **"There's so much rubbish! There's nothing but rubbish!** There's as much rubble now as there was months ago when we started building. **In fact, I don't think we're getting anywhere!"**

I can relate to that. Do you ever see so much rubble in your life that you don't think you're getting anywhere? Do you ever start to think that you will never complete any of the things God wants you to get done?

At the beginning of the rebuilding project, the people had a mind to work (**verse 6**). They were excited about getting at the task. **They pictured the walls - big strong walls - firmly in place.**

But something has happened since that great start. The text makes it very clear that there was a constant bombardment of opposition. Their enemies had sown thoughts in their minds like **maggots in a grapefruit.**

Look at **verse 12** - **"At that time the Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said to us ten times, 'You must return to us.'"**

Ten times over! I mean, talk about spiritual nagging! Never miss the plan of the enemy. Whether these predicted attacks even actually came upon these Jewish rebuilders or not (really they never did in Nehemiah's case), that constant nattering of threats is designed to keep you from thinking about the **completed wall**. It's the enemy's plan to take the confidence - the heart and soul - out of your walk with God. **Never let him do that to you.**

And you can see the effect this had on the Jewish workers - **verse 10** - **"In Judah it was said, 'The strength of those who bear the burdens is failing. There is too much rubble. By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall.'"**

"We will not be able to rebuild the wall!" Now really, there was absolutely no reason for them to say that. **They had already finished half of it.** They could have easily looked at the wall, half of its full height, extending fully around the entire city of Jerusalem. They could have seen that they **were** making progress. The task wasn't impossible. They **had already** finished much of the work.

There is such an important lesson here. If you listen to every argument, if you entertain every complaint, if you second guess the whole task every time a doubt rises in your soul, not only will you be more likely to give up and quit - **you will not even be able to see any of the progress you have already made.**

And that kind of spiritual blindness is very damaging precisely because it's **seeing the progress already made that gives you increased faith in the goodness and promise of God for the work that still remains to be done.**

Look at **verses 11 and 12** again: **"And our enemies said, 'They will not know or see till we come among them and kill them and stop the work.' [12] At that time the Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said to us ten times, 'You must return to us.'"**

Do you see the message? **"No matter what you do, it's not going to work!" Ten times that was said!** I know that there are lots of unrealistic spiritual deceptions in Christ's church. And I know there are lots of unscriptural distortions about faith and prosperity present in the church today as well. But all that aside, there is still something positive and important from God's Word for us to hear today:

Hebrews 11:6 - **"And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him."**

God is a rewarder. And please notice that holding that conviction is an absolute requirement for people of the faith. You not only have to believe in God's **existence**. You must believe He is a **rewarder**. I take that to mean if you don't hold on to the conviction that God is a rewarder, you might as well not believe in Him at all. Such a faith will do you no good.

But **why?** Why is the faith that God is a rewarder so vigorously commanded. Why **"must"** we hold on to this conviction? And the answer to that is one of the most fundamental and important principles you can learn. You **"must"** (as the writer of Hebrews insists) cling to the belief that God is a rewarder because He doesn't always **appear** to be a rewarder.

That's what faith is all about in the first place. If we always had immediate **proof** that God is a rewarder faith wouldn't be necessary or even possible.

This conviction is the *essence* of faith in God. You have to hold on to certain truths about Him. One of the truths essential to a walk of faith is that **our God is a good God. He loves to reward those who seek Him.** He *is* out to bless your life.

I don't care what the circumstances of your life seem to be screaming at you right now. I don't care about all the voices that would tell you otherwise. If you are sincerely seeking God - if you are honestly desiring to walk in His ways - **He is out to reward your life!** My Bible tells me so. **Always factor God's faithfulness and reward into the future of your circumstances.**

3) NEHEMIAH TURNS THE PEOPLE'S ATTENTION BACK TO GOD

Nehemiah 4:9 & 14 - "And we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection against them day and night....[14].... And I looked and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. **Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome,** and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes."

They were all inspired at the beginning. But now it's half way through the task. Nehemiah is a good leader. He knows the particular dangers of the half-way point in any venture for God. When you're half way into the project, it's easy to lose sight of what started you off in the first place. We need to consistently be **recalled** in our attention to God.

This is what makes the church so important for Christian people. The Bible is full of glorious promises designed just for such times of discouragement:

"They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." Notice, not **obtain** strength, but **renew** it. This is a promise to people who already know what it is to receive strength from God. They come to have it renewed to a previous level.

"He restores my soul." What a beautiful picture! Like refurbishing a precious but tattered beautiful piece of furniture. He makes it strong and attractive again.

That's why Nehemiah calls the people back to God and away from the incriminating, discouraging accusations of their enemies. They need to come back to God if they are to finish the work. If nothing else, the book of Nehemiah teaches someone like me that **I will only make it about half way rebuilding my circumstances with my own wisdom and strength.** My best efforts will only take me half way to the finish line. **We need to come back to God again and again.** This need never passes because He is the one who renews and restores.

2 Corinthians 4:16 - "So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day."

4) NEHEMIAH TURNS THEIR MINDS TO THE GREAT ISSUES AT STAKE IN THEIR FUTURE

I touched on this point just briefly a few minutes ago. Let me expand it here:

Nehemiah 4:13-14 - "So in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in open places, I stationed the people by their clans, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. [14] And I looked and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and **fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes.**"

You can see how the Holy Spirit works through Nehemiah here. It's not enough to shun the voice of the enemy. **There are crucial, long term issues at stake here.** Nehemiah reminds the people **why** they started rebuilding the wall in the first place. There are precious benefits for them in this project. I may give up working on a **stone wall**. But I'm not going to give up on my **children**

Nehemiah points to **the reason** for the wall. **You wouldn't think he'd have to point that out at all.** They must have known **why** they were building the wall. Or is it just possible that in the middle of the work, **you start to only see the work itself?** Do you just begin to see layers of stone upon stone? Do you just see a **job**, rather than an **objective?**

I wonder if that's true in the rest of the Christian life. It's easier to see all the bits and pieces of the Christian life as mere **duty**, without seeing how they all relate to the **goal of rebuilding what God has for my whole life.** Bible reading, prayer, church attendance, giving, and then there's all those other church things we do - choirs, nurseries, classes to teach, meetings to attend, so many hours of work - **if we ever begin to see only the tasks without seeing the goal of the tasks, we'll lose heart in the work for sure.**

It's easier to see all of those pieces rather than the **kind of life in God's Kingdom that the Spirit wants to use all of those things to build.** In other words, I don't teach because I happen to like this church or everything it does. If that's my motive, I'll quit and leave for another church as soon as someone does something I disagree with. No, I teach because I'm **very much in love with Jesus and He wants to use my service for Him to build me into a fruitful member of His Kingdom!**

And I don't give because I feel cheap if I don't give God a good tip. I give because I see it as one way God has given me to take people to heaven with me long after the rest of my investments have rotted into mud. I see it as **"laying up treasure in heaven."**

That's what Nehemiah does here. ***"Listen people, it's not walls we're building. It's our lives. It's our homes. It's our families!"*** Don't just see the work. See the **goal** of the work.

"I work in children's church." That's sadly understating it. ***"There are future missionaries and political leaders in our church. And every week, as long as I don't miss it, God has blessed me with the opportunity to get their lives ready for that task. What an assignment I have!"***

"I deliver Bread of Life baskets for my church." You'll soon get tired if that's how you view it. ***"Jesus said that even a cup of cold water, given in His Name would not lose its reward. And every week, I take far more than just a cup of water, I get the blessing of giving a whole basket!*** Imagine the blessing stored up for me and the impact on those who receive! I wouldn't miss it for all the world!"

5) **NEHEMIAH PROVIDES POINTS OF RALLY FOR THE PEOPLE AS THEY WORK**

Nehemiah 4:19-20 - ***"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. [20] In the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us."***

Much of the time the work had to take place while the people were far apart. ***Each individual couldn't see the progress the others were making.*** That's the important teaching point. They couldn't see the walls going up in any other section but their own. They faced much of the ridicule of the enemy on their own. And they felt small and inferior because they ***couldn't see all the other parts of the wall going up at the very same time their little section was.***

Because the people were so spread out, Nehemiah plans special times of united gathering for specific problems and challenges that might arise. ***The reason is simple. The people will be stronger together than apart.***

I wish I could tell you how hard is it to get this simple concept across to people in busy 2013. Yard by yard, there is more spiritual help and strength and hope for your future in the church than anywhere else on earth. ***Yet the simple truth is that people aren't as committed to the church as they used to be.*** The truth is your marriage needs the church. Your home needs the church. Your future walk with Jesus needs the church.

Think back to the days of the old fashioned barbecue - the ones with actual charcoal briquets. I used to find them terribly hard to light. Then I made a discovery. If you spread the briquets out from each other, they will very quickly die out. But put them close together, in a little pile, and they keep each other white hot.

That is the way God has created each of us. You will get less discouraged if you stay with the saints - even the ones you don't like. Get into the habit of encouraging everyone you meet. Don't discourage them. Build them up. Speak well of them and of their future in Jesus. Leave them feeling uplifted every time they speak with you. Get them to pray with you for your burdens.

Hebrews 10:24-25 - ***"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, [25] not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."***

Notice, this is the only verse specifically telling people to go to church in the New Testament, and it says nothing whatsoever about what they ***get out of going.*** That's because it's not about ***getting*** anything. It's all about ***putting in. It's about contributing. It's about getting together to give and encourage.***

I don't know if you've noticed it, but there's actually enough out there in the world to depress you. You and I both need the church. Even when it rebukes or corrects, the goal is to mend what is broken and get lives airborne again.

God help each one of us never to lose sight of it. Whatever you're rebuilding, don't stop! God is behind all who spend their lives fixing things for His Kingdom. Count on His grace and His reward!