

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

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HOW TO KEEP THE JOY OF YOUR CALLING (part a)

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."

I want to take the next two Sundays on a very important subject. The topic is ***how to keep the joy of your calling***. What a wonderful theme! I want to talk to you about your calling as a builder, role model, and leader in God's Kingdom. That's what this passage is all about.

Sooner or later, it is the enemy's plan to thwart the role of leadership in the Kingdom of God. And I don't just mean leadership in the obvious sense. I'm not just talking about pastors and board members and department heads as such. I'm talking about any area where you take ***responsibility*** in the Body of Christ - your ***sphere of influence*** - the places you're trying to ***make a difference for God***.

I'm talking about your Christian Education class, your Bible study, your work in your home as you try to lead your family into deeper life in Jesus, the way to work at the office as you try to show people the way to the Father. I'm talking about your calling as ***Christ's ambassador*** and the effort you put out to make a difference for Him.

Listen - ***none of that goes unchallenged by the enemy***. Peter wasn't the only one the devil desired to "sift like wheat!" Paul talked about this whole process in **Ephesians 6:10-18** - "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. [11] Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. [12] For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. [13] Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. [14] Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, [15] and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. [16] In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; [17] and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, [18] praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints...."

Now that process of opposition is constant. This is the heart of ***spiritual warfare***. And it happens all the time in all of our lives. But what I want to point out today is whatever opposition you face from the devil day by day in your Christian walk, ***it's intensified a thousand times when you determine, like Nehemiah, that there's something that really needs to be done for the Lord - something that will build a force against darkness long term down the road***.

Never think the enemy will rest while you're trying to regain ground, or trying to rebuild what has been torn down and move ahead to new levels of maturity and growth in the ways of God. Remember, whenever you ***initiate***, the enemy will ***oppose***. If you're not doing anything, he won't be either. You are of very little personal interest to the devil. It's the ***work of God*** he hates. It's the determined heart that he resists. He hates to see the kingdom of God expanded. He hates ***builders***.

Let's look at some key principles from this sixth chapter. I have ***three points***. We'll start into them today and finish them next week:

1) **ATTACKS WILL COME ON YOU PERSONALLY AS A LEADER**

This is what makes Nehemiah chapter six quite unique in our study. Up until now the ***workers*** have been harassed - "***What are these feeble Jews doing?***"(4:2). After that, the ***quality*** of their work was mocked - "***If a fox climbed up on it he would break it down***"(4:3 - speaking of the wall they were beginning to build).

Thankfully, under Nehemiah's leadership, none of those things stopped the work. Now a third level of attack is employed. They begin to attack Nehemiah himself - his motives, his character, his integrity.

Be sure of it. If you're trying to do something for the Lord, the enemy will arrange and orchestrate **people** to tear you down each step of the way. Expect it. Plan on it. And above all, ***instead of getting mad at people, recognize the real nature of the battle.***

That's why Paul takes such great pains in Ephesians chapter six to point this out over and over again: ***"...stand against the schemes of the devil..."(11) - "...we do not wrestle against flesh and blood..."(12).*** Or, positively, our struggle is ***"...against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places"(12).***

Have you ever taken the time to notice the placing of those verses in the flow of the teaching of the whole book of Ephesians? They don't come in those great doctrinal chapters in the first part of the book. In other words, Paul isn't just ***theologizing about the nature of the devil and the powers of darkness in these statements.***

No. He talks about the need to recognize the activity of the devil right in the same part of the book where he's just been writing about ***husbands and wives*** in the marriage relationship, ***children and parents*** and the humdrum of making things work in the home, ***workers and their bosses*** in the sweat of staying alive in a dog eat dog world.

That's where the devil works most effectively ***because people don't see him at work there.*** All they see is a nagging wife or a slob for a husband. All they see is a rebellious son or an abusive father. All they see is a lazy worker or an unreasonable boss!

That's where Paul wants to come screaming into those situations and remind Christians - ***"Listen, you're not seeing the real picture. You're not fighting the real enemy. Don't let the devil set you against your brother when your brother isn't the real problem!"***

Remember this all the time. When some mother comes barking about something she doesn't like in the nursery, even though she's never worked in the nursery a day in her life, don't just assume that's a short-fused person trying to wreck your morning. There's more to it than that.

You're doing something for Jesus. You're fulfilling your calling in ministry so moms and dads can hear something fresh about Jesus, undistracted in the sanctuary, ***and the devil hates that! He is out to take the heart and soul out of your work a million times over.***

2) **DON'T ALWAYS ASSUME THAT BECAUSE YOU FACE OPPOSITION, YOU'RE NOT THE RIGHT PERSON FOR THE JOB**

Whether you're a Bible Study leader, or Christian Education teacher, or the leader of some department in the church, or trying to head some initiative in your home or work for Jesus, ***remember that once you're a doer, you're a target.***

I can't tell you the number of times people will come to me and say something like this - "I thought God had this ministry for me but things just don't seem to be falling into place." Or, "I guess there must be somebody else who can do it better. I'd better back out now before I just make things worse."

I'm not arguing that there aren't times for people to rethink their calling to some particular task. I know you can be the wrong person for a specific job. You discover some things by trial and error.

But I also know this: ***If you're teachable, if you're humble, and if you truly desire to serve Jesus for His honor and His glory, for every time someone stays in their role too long, there are a thousand times the enemy brings doubt and fear and confusion to hearts, and drives dear precious people, wounded and bleeding, out of some role that could have been fruitfully maintained if they had just seen where the attack was coming from and stayed steady and true, trusting in the Lord!***

I am sure of this, when it comes to persistence in serving Jesus, the devil will tell you to quit far more often than the Holy Spirit will. And the opposition will come through misguided people who don't even know the dark spiritual role they are playing in tearing down something important in God's Kingdom.

All of this leads to the third point:

3) **STAY FOCUSED AND DETERMINED IN YOUR WORK FOR THE LORD**

There are three tactics used in this passage to pull Nehemiah from the goal of finishing the wall: They are, ***distraction, slander and fear.*** We'll look at the first of these now and the other two next Sunday:

- a) **DISTRACTION - Nehemiah 6:1-4** - "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."

You have to ask the question - ***Why won't Nehemiah go and meet with these people?*** It seems like such a noble and loving gesture to dialogue. Doesn't he want to make peace? Doesn't he care about loving his enemies? After all, a wall is just ***stones.***

These are real **people** - flesh and blood. How can Nehemiah be so heartless?

And the answer to all of those questions is clear from the text. This is not the first time Nehemiah has faced these people. **He has come to know their hearts. He knows the difference between people who want to solve a problem and people who simply want to drag him away from his assignment before God.**

Verse three is one of the great verses for anyone who is committed to carrying out a task for the Lord in the face of criticism and opposition: **"...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 knows the goal of these people isn't to make peace. The goal is to keep the wall from going up. These are fruitless people and they simply can't stand seeing anyone else committed to fruitfulness.

Make no mistake about it - what keeps Nehemiah **safe from harm**, and what keeps him **fruitful in his ministry** is one thing only - he keeps his eyes on the Lord and his hand to the task. You need a **sense of assignment to be safe and to be fruitful in God's Kingdom**. You have to remember Who it is you serve and why you do what you do.

I can't make this truth too practical. You're trying to rebuild your marriage. Hold on to that goal with all your might! It's not going to be an easy task. Like Nehemiah's wall, it won't be built in a day. Keep God's blueprint from His Word! Never let go of it.

You're committed to training children for Christ in Christian Education or Children's Church. Keep that worthy goal and calling right in front of your mind, even when you take phone calls from people with their complaints.

You're committed to praying your unsaved son or daughter into God's Kingdom. Don't believe the devil every time he tells you it won't work. Don't listen to those who will point out all your flaws as a parent. If you have flaws and failures, then learn and correct them. **But for goodness' sake, keep going! Keep praying! Stay focussed on what you're building, not on anything else!** Please remember, you wrestle against more than fatigue. What you are going through **feels** like mere fatigue, but it's different. The enemy wants to wear you out even though your body is still strong. Only **spiritual nourishment** will meet this need. It goes far deeper than merely more sleep and a break from it all.

Certainly those things have their place, but they will only renew **physical** strength. And as important as that is, you and I need more than **physical strength** to do **spiritual work**. Thousands of Christians are looking for help everywhere but the right place. This kind of renewal can't be had at Club Med or Sandals. You won't find it at any beach or country club. It won't come from more golf or more tennis. As good as those things are, they can never meet this need. It comes from **waiting on the Lord**:

Isaiah 40:31 - **"....but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint."**

Waiting on the Lord Jesus keeps your eyes on Him. Distraction leads to spiritual burn-out. Keep the lamp of the **calling of your life** passionate. Keep your eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith.