

Nick Tarter / General

Nehemiah 4:1–8 NASB 2020

Now it came about that when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became furious and very angry, and he mocked the Jews. And he spoke in the presence of his brothers and the wealthy people of Samaria and said, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Are they going to restore *the temple* for themselves? Can they offer sacrifices? Can they finish *it* in a day? Can they revive the stones from the heaps of rubble, even the burned ones?" Now Tobiah the Ammonite *was* near him, and he said, "Even what they are building—if a fox were to jump *on it*, it would break their stone wall down!"

Hear, O our God, how we are *an object of* contempt! Return their taunting on their own heads, and turn them into plunder in a land of captivity. Do not forgive their guilt and do not let their sin be wiped out before You, for they have demoralized the builders.

So we built the wall, and the entire wall was joined together to half its *height*, for the people had a mind to work.

Now when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the repair of the walls of Jerusalem went on, *and* that the breaches began to be closed, they were very angry. So all of them conspired together to come to fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it.

Intro

Ryan's story of God's power to overcome his sin nature in order to live for Him.

Truth

Big Idea: It is often the case that when God's work begins, opposition to it will intensify. Even so, as we rise to go with God where He is taking us, His empowering grace will be with us and with His help we will be victorious.

We would do well to remember Paul's words to Timothy.

2 Timothy 3:12 NASB 2020

Indeed, all who want to live in a godly way in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

I. Ridicule is to be expected. (1-3)

a. When God is working, Satan and the kingdom of darkness are threatened.

i. *Even the mere presence of God's people going about God's business strikes fear into our enemies and those who are with Satan will act in Satanic ways.*

1. This fear often leads to the wicked becoming angry at us, often irrationally.

a. Satan is known as the accuser of the brethren for a reason. He is an accuser and those who walk in his ways will be accusatory also.

b. As believers, it is helpful for us to remember what Paul told the Ephesians.

Ephesians 6:12 NASB 2020

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.

i. The fact is that there is a spiritual dimension which is always influencing our visible world.

1. All who are under Adam rather than Christ are being influenced by the kingdom of darkness and so our ultimate struggle isn't against people, but against

Satan and his horde of evil spirits.

2. The fact that they are being influenced by the demonic realm does not absolve wicked people from responsibility however. They are still culpable for their decision to go with Satan rather than with Christ.
3. We however, must recognize that if we are to win the battle on the surface, we must go to war with those who are the true influencers over dark humanity.

b. Satan loves to remind us of how small and powerless we are and those who are wit him will echo those sorts of accusations.

- i. *He is not wrong in one sense, but do not walk alone.*

Luke 18:27 NASB 2020

But He said, "The things that are impossible with people are possible with God."

Philippians 4:13 NASB 2020

I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

1. Scripture is clear that while on our own we may not amount to much, with Christ's help we are more than a force to be reckoned with.

Romans 8:31–39 NASB 2020

What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *is* against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring charges against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, but rather, was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? *Will* tribulation, or trouble, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? Just as it is written:

"FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE KILLED ALL DAY LONG;

WE WERE REGARDED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED."

But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- ii. *As Christians, we can actually agree with Satan that we are small and powerless alone, but then we remind him that Christ is with us and as long as Christ is with us, he is toast.*

1 John 4:4 NASB 2020

You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.

II. When challenged, we must look to God. (4-5)

a. Nehemiah's response to being mocked was to pray.

- i. When we pray it takes our eyes off of our impossible situation and puts our eyes onto God who does the impossible everyday.

b. Nehemiah prayed with confidence, knowing that he was doing the Lord's work.

- i. If we are doing our own will, we have reason to be nervous but if we are doing God's will we can have every confidence even in the face of very intimidating circumstances.
 - 1. It is critical that we make sure we are pursuing God's will with our lives rather than serving our own purposes or the purposes of man.
- ii. When we know that God has called us to do something, we can trust in His authority and in His power to accomplish anything through us.
- iii. We can also trust that God will bring judgement upon all who oppose His work.

III. Success will always be the ultimate outcome when

we are set on doing the Lord's work. (6)

a. Whose work are we set on accomplishing?

- i. A key phrase in verse 6 is "the people had a mind to work."
 1. Their minds were collectively set not on the pursuit of their own desires, their own pursuits, or on personal gain. They were set on carrying out the Lord's will.
 - a. The work was not easy by any means, but by persevering through the difficulty and by unwavering faith in God, they did what God called them to do.
 - b. Most of the time God does not do the work for us, but He joins us in the work and empowers our efforts.
 - i. ***Grace is the empowering work of God in our lives, the power to live up to His righteous standards for us, to walk in His new life, and do work with Him towards bringing about His purposes in the world.***
 2. Even when God does do the work for His people, He expects us to show up. In fact, showing up is a basic prerequisite God generally requires.
 - i. What if Jonathan had never gone down to the front alone with his armor bearer?
 - ii. What if Daniel had just fallen in line with the other exiles?
 - iii. What if Elijah had never confronted Ahab and the prophets of Baal?
 - iv. What if David had never gone down to meet Goliath?
 - v. What if Nehemiah had shed a few tears but then forgot about those who were suffering in Israel?
 - vi. Risk is nearly always involved in stepping out to follow God's leading. However, God is always kind to meet His children when we do.
2. When the people of God are resolute in accomplishing God's

will together, they become a powerful and unrelenting force for good, empowered by the Holy Spirit and emboldened by their faith in God.

- b. **We must understand that our success will not always be immediate when we go with God, but it is always imminent.**
 - i. Sometimes we see the success immediately like Nehemiah and sometimes we don't even see it in our lifetime like Jeremiah.
 - ii. However, because our faith is in God and God never fails, we know that our work for God will always ultimately have a successful outcome.

IV. Wherever God is working, opposition often increases. (7-8)

I want to be clear with what I am saying in these messages. We are not to obsess over those who oppose us, but it is wise and necessary for us to be aware of opposition to our cause and where it is coming from. The Lord has called us to be very shrewd in the way we approach the world around us.

Luke 16:8–13 NASB 2020

And his master complimented the unrighteous manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light. And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the wealth of unrighteousness, so that when it is all gone, they will receive you into the eternal dwellings.

"The one who is faithful in a very little thing is also faithful in much; and the one who is unrighteous in a very little thing is also unrighteous in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the *use of* unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true *wealth* to you? And if you have not been faithful in *the use of* that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."

Christ commends us as Kingdom people to use the resources we have from

this unrighteous world for Kingdom purposes. This includes our finances. Christians are to be the most generous and cheerful givers towards the causes God cares about.

It also means we are to be wise with our time and the other aspects of our lives. We are called by Christ to be a people living in an unrighteous world who are dedicated to His Kingdom and leveraging all that we may have here as an investment into His coming Kingdom.

Matthew 10:16–17 NASB 2020

“Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be as wary as serpents, and as innocent as doves. But be on guard against people, for they will hand you over to *the* courts and flog you in their synagogues;

Ephesians 5:15–16 NASB 2020

So then, be careful how you walk, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil.

There is a real sense in the Scriptures, that the sinful world we live in is working against us as Kingdom people and that if we want to make something out of our time in this life we must fight for it.

Yet we must always bear in mind that we fight not in our own strength, but by the Spirit’s power in us. Unless we are walking by the Spirit in the truth of the Word, we cannot be effective as Kingdom people in the midst of a world in opposition to God.

a. **Anytime a Kingdom of God flag is planted in enemy territory, the enemy will oppose us.**

i. *Christ’s victory in the world spells ultimate doom for the kingdom of darkness and so darkness will always fight to oppose God’s light.*

1. It is only natural for the sons of this world to oppose God and His kingdom.

a. Being shrouded in darkness they can neither comprehend the light nor can they stand its presence.

John 1:3–5 NASB 2020

All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him not even one thing came into being that has come into being.

In Him was life, and the life was the Light of mankind. And the Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not grasp it.

John 3:19–21 NASB 2020

And this is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the Light; for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light, so that his deeds will not be exposed. But the one who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds will be revealed as having been performed in God.”

- ii. *Our world is entirely upside-down when compared with God's kingdom.*
 - 1. The Devil and his cohorts are often utterly confused and their corrupted sensibilities offended when they are faced with the true reality which comes from God.
 - 2. They may attempt to bring us back down to earth with their taunts. They would love to get our eyes off of God and back onto our limitations.
 - a. The following words come from Bible Scholar Derek Thomas...

Ezra & Nehemiah A Challenge to Morale

This kind of ridicule and intimidation has always been something that the church has had to face. When Jesus told the professional mourners in Jairus's house that his daughter was not dead but asleep (though physically, she certainly was dead), they laughed him to scorn (Luke 8:53). When Paul spoke to Governor Festus about Jesus Christ, the response was: “Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind” (Acts 26:24).

Gospel Application

Through Nehemiah today we have seen that God is steadfast and that He empowers His people for the work he has called us to do. We have also been reminded that we are God's people who are called to be ever looking to Him rather than to our circumstances for our sense of well being. He

always accomplishes what He has set out to do, so if He has called us to a work we can be confident that we will be able to do it with His help. We are a people who are empowered by and ultimately defended by God, the ultimate Judge over everything.

Christ has died for us. Christ has risen for us. If the Father has not spared His only Son for us, how much more can we trust in Him to empower us, to forgive our shortcomings, to revive our burnt stones, and to go with us wherever we go?

Challenge

1. Recognize our own abandonment.
 - a. A common theme of Nehemiah is that the people of God must repent of where we have deviated from the way of the Lord.
 - b. Take stock of yourself. Are there any ways in which you have abandoned your post as a Kingdom person living in the midst of a broken world?
 - c. I would encourage each of us to not only take stock, but take time to repent and return to God wherever He highlights some way in which we have diverged from His path for us.
2. Reignite our zeal for His work.
 - a. The Lord is calling us to a practice of prayer rather than personal offense when people oppose us.
 - i. The Lord is fighting for us and working through us, but we must seek Him out.
 - b. The Lord is calling us to a general practice of keeping our eyes on focused on Christ rather than being distracted by the world's temptations and attempts to belittle us.
 - i. When we choose to immerse ourselves into prayer and His word each day, this helps us to stay focused on Him. Too many Christians are missing this habit and it is sucking the life out of us.

- c. The Lord is calling us to the practice of being filled with the Holy Spirit.
 - i. It is only by the Spirit that we can do anything truly god. Scripture calls us be being filled with the Holy Spirit rather than with other spirits of this age.
 - 1. This requires intentionality on our part. It requires prayer and positioning ourselves in the best posture for the Spirit to meet with us daily.

Ephesians 5:17–18 NASB 2020

Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord *is*. And do not get drunk with wine, in which there is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,

We will be challenged. We will have opposition. Yet we will be successful and we will not only overcome, but we will thrive with the Lord's help so long as we remain in Him. The Lord does most of the work for us, but our challenge is to simply be in place where He has called us to be. So long as we show up, He will meet us.

Are we showing up now? What is the Spirit leading you to do each day to make sure you are meeting Him where He wants you to be?

Let us commit ourselves to going after God together that He might empower us to live for His glory and to rebuild what is broken both in our lives and in the world around us.