

Nehemiah Sermon #10

Turn in your Bibles to Nehemiah 4

The word *repaired* dominated the last chapter

The word *repair* was used 35 times in Chapter 3, and it means “to make strong and firm.”

Chapter 3 might give the impression that after Nehemiah had carefully and wisely assigned everyone to a particular section of the wall, everything progressed smoothly and without difficulty.

Not so! From that point forward, the children of Israel faced incredible opposition from their enemies.

Nehemiah, in Chapter 4, details this opposition.

I've entitled today's message “Pray and Work”

Say that with me

Nehemiah 4:1

Let us stand for the reading of God's Holy Word

Nehemiah 4:1-9

Let us pray

You may be seated

Pray and Work

Before the tremendous work of the previous chapter had been finished, the enemy was again on the scene.

Where God's interests are involved, the enemy will always be found, active and perverse.

Vs. 1a

Have you noticed that Sanballat is mentioned first every time?
He is the main instigator of trouble against the Jews.

You might ask—Why does he oppose this work?

Sanballat and his associates wanted to keep the Jews weak and dependent.

A strong Jerusalem would endanger the balance of power in the region, and it would also rob Sanballat and his friends of wealth.

As long as the people in Jerusalem were a reproach, a disgrace, the enemy left them alone; but, when the Jews began to serve the Lord and bring glory to God's name, the enemy became active.

As long as you're not doing much for the Lord – You don't have to worry about the enemy.

Vs. 1 ab

That means the rebuilding was in progress, that they were busy working on it.

Nehemiah described Sanballat's emotions quite graphically (Vs. 1).

Literally, "he was enraged."

Sanballat became furious! What prompted his opposition?

The success of Nehemiah in rebuilding the people and the wall.

Anger will often be the world's response to God's work because it challenges worldviews and values.

I John 3:13 says, "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you."

God's work *never* goes forward without opposition.

Sanballat then incited his followers to oppose the reconstruction effort.

Notice the others involved in the opposition:

Vs. 2 – Brethren and the army of Samaria

Vs. 3 – (Tobiah the Ammonite was near him.)

I point this out to emphasize something that is usually true: Critics run with critics, gossipers with gossipers, sinners with sinners and the Godly with the Godly.

Sanballat addressed his nobles and his army.

This was the beginning of a propaganda campaign against the Jews.

Not all criticism is of the devil, but this criticism was.

It was destructive and disturbing.

Sanballat mocked the Jews – these words hurt; they stung.

Ridicule and mockery have always been devastating weapons.

Sarcasm and scorn are, perhaps, the most frequently used arrows in his quiver.

To be the object of cruel jokes for the sake of Christ can be extremely trying, especially if you are a young person or a young believer.

Notice how he mocked the Jews.

Sanballat used five rhetorical questions!

Vs. 2

I. First, Sanballat ridiculed *the workers* by calling them “feeble Jews”

The word *feeble* means “withered, miserable.” . . .

This statement took advantage of a “truth” about which the Jews were sensitive!

They knew they were not strong or numerous.

When we are weak, then we are strong (II Cor. 12:10).

Then Sanballat ridiculed *the work* itself by asking three taunting questions.

II. “Will they fortify themselves?” must have evoked showers of laughter from the Samaritan army.

III. “Will they sacrifice?” implies, “It will take more than prayer and worship to rebuild the city!”

IV. “Will they finish in a day?” suggests that the Jews didn’t know how difficult the task was and would soon call it quits.

V. In his final question, Sanballat ridiculed *the materials* they were using, end of vs. 2

It is true that limestone is softened by fire, it is also true that the walls were “broken down,” -- not burned down -- while the gates were “consumed with fire” – Not the walls (Neh. 2:13).

So there was still plenty of good material in the rubble for the builders to use.

Most of the stones were still in good condition.

This question used some wrong information to discourage the builders.

The enemy will point out the weaknesses and use half-truths to intimidate – dishearten God's people.

Vs. 3

Tobiah is what we would call a wisecracker—comes through with a sarcastic remark.

Now a fox is a very light-footed animal.

A fox can walk over ground and not leave much of a track.

A fox can run on a wall and not disturb a thing on it.

What Tobiah is saying is that these feeble Jews are building a wall that even a light-footed fox would knock down.

You have to remember that most of the construction crew—they were not builders.

This is not their normal job. Tobiah took advantage of that.

Now, Tobiah is exaggerating.

Archaeological excavations found Nehemiah's wall to be about nine feet thick.

Tobiah made a crucial mistake—that was not "their" wall. It was God's wall.

Opposition to the work of God is opposition to God.

It is a critical mistake that the enemy makes and we often make

God is very interested in what goes on here.

God is going to protect it and God is going to defend it.

Nehemiah did not make that mistake!

Nehemiah was faced with opposition. He did two significant things in response to the criticism: He prayed and he persisted.

The first thing Nehemiah did was to turn to God in prayer.

God's people should always regard prayer not as a last resort but as our primary weapon against opposition.

The resource and the recourse of Nehemiah was prayer.

The very first thing that ought to result from criticism is prayer.

This principle should be applied in business, at home, and at school, as well as at church.

Nehemiah prayed and asked God to fight the enemy for him. Why don't we do that?
Vs. 4

Folks, this is the third time we find Nehemiah praying. He prayed in chapter 1, (1:4-11), chapter 2 (2:4), and now in chapter 4. It will not be the last time he prays.

Nehemiah continued utilizing this divine resource throughout the total process of rebuilding the wall.

In verses 4 and 5, *he talked to God about the criticism.*

Vs. 4a – We are despised – we are mocked – we are scorned

Vs. 4b - "Turn their reproach on their own heads and give them up for plunder in a land of captivity."

Bring on them what they have desired/wished for us.

This prayer of vindication is couched in strong language.

He was not requesting personal vengeance but vindication for God's people.

The opposition of Sanballat and Tobiah against the Jews was in reality opposition against God.

Nehemiah's request was for divine judgment against sin, a clear teaching in Scripture. It was a prayer for God to act.

“Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give [it away] place unto wrath: for it is written ‘Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.’ Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:19-21).

Say hello and smile – wave at him!

It is common knowledge that the first thing most leaders will do when attacked is retaliate.

Leaders are often people of very strong wills.

Nehemiah didn't allow himself to get in the flesh and therefore detour the work.

He was definitely praying “against his enemies.”

Nehemiah countered this opposition.

They met this “corporate threat” with “corporate prayer”!

As far as we know, this is the first time the burden for prayer was sensed by more than Nehemiah.

The rest of the people prayed, too.

In his use of the first person . . . vs. 4, vs. 6, vs. 9, vs. 15, vs. 21

Vs. 6

In Chapter 3, as we moved around the wall, we saw that different people were allocated a certain section of wall to repair so that the wall was going up all the way around the city at the same time.

That was a smart plan.

They managed to build it about halfway up.

I want you to know this—Nehemiah ignored the sarcasm of the enemy.

He prayed to God and he continued to build.

The best thing to do is to pray and commit the whole thing to the Lord; and then get right back to work!

Some people pray and wait for things to happen. Not Nehemiah!

He prayed, and at the same time, continued to rebuild the wall.

He put feet to his prayers.

They “had a mind to work.”

Not only were they energized and excited about what they were doing, but they were literally attacking this project with a spirit of unity and oneness.

They were all moving in the same direction.

The unifying factor was the wall and the single-minded desire of the people to see it rebuilt.

Thus there was a remarkable solidarity of the workers with the work.

It’s amazing what can happen when people work together as one unit.

Nehemiah demonstrated remarkable leadership skills in keeping his work force focused and faithful.

“So we rebuilt the wall” is a commendation of God’s faithfulness in response to prayer and of the people’s courage and determination.

The people continued steadfastly toward the goal.

The Bible says, they had a mind to work.

A Heart to Work

There's an important dynamic that must not go unnoticed in this process.

The children of Israel continued to make rapid progress in the midst of Sanballat's demoralizing efforts because "the people had a mind [*heart*] to work"

They did not allow discouragement—which was the focus of Sanballat's tactic—to destroy their morale.

Nothing will take the wind out of our sails as quickly as discouragement.

Discouragement comes on the heels of criticism.

Vs. 7

There are times when criticism doesn't die down—it **intensifies**.

Not only did the critics expand, but they also added intensity in the opposition.

A common enemy and a common cause brought four different groups together to stop the work on the walls of Jerusalem.

A new group, the Ashdodites, now joins the alliance; they were from the west-southwest

Ashdod was perhaps the most important city in Philistia at that time, and the Philistines (steens) did not want to see a strong community in Jerusalem.

When Sanballat and his friends realized that their ridicule was not successful in stopping the work on the wall, their anger increased, and their plans escalated.

They knew they needed to take more desperate measures if they were going to stop the Jews from completing the job.

They called an emergency meeting and quickly concluded that they would have to launch a military attack on Jerusalem from all sides (v. 8).

Vs. 8

They planned a conspiracy and arranged to cause a disturbance.

The plan was that they would come against Jerusalem to hinder the work.

The word “hinder” in the Hebrew is interesting, it means to cause a miscarriage.

Their intention was to intervene in such a way that the entire project would be aborted.

Conspiracies come in all shapes and sizes.

Some are as simple as several people banding together to hurt someone’s feelings or reputation.

Some are so evil that they involve a plot to harm someone physically—even committing murder.

Most of us will never forget the plot against Nancy Kerrigan during the tryouts for the 1994 Winter Olympics.

Who was behind the plot? Tonya Harding

Vs. 8 – Their plotting clearly included potential raids and harassments and had to be taken seriously.

Vs. 9 – “Nevertheless” -- Persistence

What did Nehemiah do when confronted with continued harassment?

As was his custom, he intensified his prayer.

While they prayed for divine help, they also “set up a guard” against their enemies “day and night” (v. 9).

The Jews exhibited a balance between faith in God and readiness, employing some of the wall builders as guards.

Failure to have done so would have been foolhardy and presumptuous.

Nehemiah’s response was clear: prayer and precaution, trust and good management. He trusted God, but he also was aware of the dangers and took necessary precautions.

When Saul was after David, David prayed and he ran

Principle 1. We should pray about situations that cause fear and anxiety.

I’ve seen this prayer process work in my own life.

My major shortcoming is that I don’t utilize this divine resource enough.

I have found Philippians 4 is a great chapter in dealing with opposition.

Philippians 4:4 – “Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.”

Philippians 4:6a – “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.”

Philippians 4:7 – “And the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 4:8 – “Finally brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue and if there be any praise, think on these things.”

We’ve got to think on the right things.

Philippians 4:13 – “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”

Principle 2. We should pray in the will of God

Vs. 4 & 5

To be able to pray in the will of God, we must have a good knowledge of the Word of God. It's in the Word of God that we discover the will of God.

This church is God's work, and God wants His church to go forward – Amen!
Let's pray that way.

Principle 3. We should combine diligent prayer with diligent work.

We've seen this principle illustrated several times in Nehemiah's ministry. God grants us the privilege to pray about *everything* but He also expects us to do *everything* we can to resolve our problems.

Principle 4 When we're discouraged, there are several things we can do:

1. Check our energy level physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Nothing causes discouragement and interferes with our ability to cope with problems more than just plain exhaustion.

Elijah illustrates (I Kings 19:4) – Elijah sat down – said it was enough – And he wanted to die.

Do you know what God did for him? God sent him food and water.

This water/food did not solve Elijah's problem completely. However, when he was rested and nourished, he was able to cope more effectively with the challenges that lay before him.

2. Make sure you are getting proper physical exercise.

You'll find that it gives you more energy.

3. Spend some time with someone who is not discouraged.

Nothing pulls me out of the doldrums faster than to spend time with someone who is happy, excited, and positive about life. Be with encouragers.

4. Do something for someone else.

Rather than sitting around feeling sorry for ourselves, look for an opportunity to do something for someone else.

Pray and work!

Let us stand for closing invitation.

Are you being criticized?

Has discouragement set in?

Pray and work.

Pray and work.

I wonder if you're here this morning and you're not on God's team.

God's team is going to win.

Faith is the victory that overcomes the world.

Faith in what – Jesus Christ

God so loved us