

Nehemiah Sermon #8

Turn in your Bibles to Nehemiah 2

Things are picking up speed in the book of Nehemiah.

Nehemiah was praying for a long time – then we find him in Jerusalem – he goes out at night to do a secret survey.

The stage is now set and the drama is about to begin.

I've entitled today's message "Rallying the Saints"

Nehemiah 2:17

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

Nehemiah 2:17-20

Let us pray.

You may be seated

Rallying the Saints

After Nehemiah had finished his inspection and made his decision about what to do, he summoned all the people listed in the preceding verse.

Nothing is said of the time span between vv. 16 and 17.

It might have been the morning following his nighttime inspection.

Nehemiah's first challenge was to convince the people to tackle this project.

Nehemiah hit the problem head-on. He challenged the people!

I love the way Nehemiah addresses this problem in VS. 17a.

He states the obvious

He stated that the Jews were in (distress) trouble

The word *distress* is a strong word – adversity, calamity

For the first time since his arrival in Jerusalem, Nehemiah disclosed the real purpose of his visit, and he asks them to join him – vs. 17b.

He said, "Come, let us build up the wall."

Nehemiah extended the invitation to rebuild the walls and gave the people a reason to accept his invitation: "That we may no longer be a reproach."

To no longer live in disgrace and shame.

This is God's City!

Now, along with Nehemiah's Encouragement to Rebuild the Walls

They would need a little convincing.

This is a critical juncture because Nehemiah had to overcome negativism.

Imagine the negative thoughts and feelings that must have gripped the hearts of the Jews when they heard Nehemiah's challenge.

First, they'd be skeptical. Who is this guy? Where did he come from? Who does he think he is? And rebuild the walls!

Doesn't he understand what we're facing? He's asking us to do the impossible!

Nehemiah was no novice when it came to understanding people and their feelings. He certainly had anticipated their negative reactions.

Apparently, before his people could even voice their negative feelings, Nehemiah went on to report how God had already helped him.

VS.18a

Nehemiah made it clear to them that he was not an upstart who wanted to bring them trouble by acting without permission.

In the first place the favor of God was on him. . . . God had sent him on this mission.

In the second place he had the permission of Artaxerxes to rebuild the walls. This gave him a double authority that was impossible to oppose.

Notice in VS. 18 – Nehemiah speaks first of God then secondly of the king.

This was indeed the right order. It was his genuine conviction.

The credentials of Nehemiah were now on the table and nobody would be so bold as to deny them.

Then the people responded, "Let us rise up and build."

At some point during Nehemiah's report, negative feelings turned positive.

Despair turned to hope. They believed Nehemiah and trusted him.

It was at this point that Nehemiah emerged as a leader in Jerusalem.

Nehemiah succeeded in getting his message through and rallying God's people.

Together and with enthusiasm, the people responded and said, "Let us rise up and build." And that's exactly what they did.

And the Bible says – VS. 18

So they strengthened their hands for this good work.

What does this mean "that they strengthened their hands"?

The implication of this statement seems to be that they strengthened each other's hands.

They seized each others hands for the work.

They were encouraging themselves – we can do this.

This is what God wants us to do.

Nehemiah had rallied the people to "roll up their sleeves," put their "shoulders to the grind-stone", and attack what they believed was an impossible task.

Nehemiah used four incentives:

(1) He identified with the people; he spoke of "the trouble *we* are in."

He used three vitally important words in verse 17: *we*, *us*, and *we*.

He had been in the city only a few days, but he spoke of "we" and "us" and not "you" and "them." . . .

Nehemiah's second incentive:

Secondly – he stressed the seriousness of the situation.

A leader must be realistic and honestly assess the facts.

People will have confidence in such a leader.

Thirdly - Nehemiah was committed to taking definite action.

And #4 - He used his personal testimony to assure them of God's favor on the project (v. 18). A Christian leader must encourage trust in God by leading in faith as well as in action.

There are basically two kinds of motivation: *extrinsic motivation*, which is the most common, and *intrinsic motivation*, which appeals to the internal part of a person – to the soul, to the heart, to the mind.

Extrinsic motivation appeals to the flesh – People have some kind of dangling carrot before them. You do this – You get this!

Nehemiah did not promise any material or financial incentives when he addressed the people.

He didn't offer prizes to the fastest-working families.

He didn't offer a week at the Sea of Galilee in the Hyatt Hotel for the group doing the most attractive work.

He didn't stoop to that kind of motivation—but many churches do.

Put your name on a plaque or in a special place if you give a certain amount.

Nehemiah simply said, "Do you see our city? Let's rebuild the wall."

And the people said, "Let's do it."

Why did the citizens respond positively to Nehemiah's proposal?

Nehemiah was able to appeal to their intrinsic.

Nehemiah was able to appeal to the greater good.

I have always wondered why Winston Churchill was so loved by Great Britain.

Somehow Churchill, stubby and stocky fella, could stand in front of a microphone and strengthen Britons by the thousands with intrinsic motivation.

He appealed to the greater good.

He had just become Prime Minister.

Listen to his words in speeches he delivered in the summer of 1940 – Nazis are blitzing England:

I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat.

(intrinsic motivation)

Victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory however long and hard the road may be; for without victory there is no survival.

We shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight in the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air; we shall defend our Island whatever the cost may be.

We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender.

And the people of Great Britain rallied.

Intrinsic motivation

I'm reminded of David when into the face of that giant across the valley.

He said, "Is there not a cause?" "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?"

King Saul had used extrinsic motivation – give you my daughter, finances, etc., etc.

David used both intrinsic and extrinsic. Remember it was David who said the man who takes the stronghold of Jebus/Jebusites - will be the chief and captain (I Chron. 11).

Who did it? JOAB

Nehemiah came to them with compassion, realism, conviction, and faith; thus God used him to communicate and motivate the people to begin the “good work.”

It takes both the hands of leadership and the hands of partnership to accomplish the work of the Lord.

Reach over to the person next to you and take their hand.

It takes that person, it takes you, it takes me – to accomplish God’s work.

Leaders can’t do the job by themselves, and workers can’t accomplish much without leadership.

“Let’s do this job. God is with us.” They all responded to his enthusiasm and said, “Let us rise up and build.”

The people responded to this man.

Now folks, you didn’t think it was going to be that easy -

VS. 19

Right away opposition comes! It never fails.

There is direct (in-your-face) criticism.

My first thought is—how did they hear about it?

We must accept that the enemies were well informed.

My second thought is—Nehemiah is moving quickly because of vs. 10.
Nehemiah is going to get a jump on his enemies.

So, word regarding rebuilding the walls spread rapidly to the enemies of Israel.

Notice there is a new team member.

A third name is now added to those of Sanballat and Tobiah -- Geshem

There is evidence that *Geshem* was an even more powerful figure than his companions, though probably less earnestly committed to their cause.

His name appears on a fifth century B.C. silver vessel donated to an Arabian goddess.
Which reads, “Son of Geshem, king of Qedar.”

From other sources it emerges that Geshem was a powerful chieftain and his son ruled a league of Arabian tribes which took control of Moab and Edom under the Persian Empire.

From all that we can tell, *Geshem* most likely ruled to the south of Jerusalem.

So, with already a hostile Samaria (to the north) – with Sanballat – and Ammon (to the east) – with Tobiah – Judah was now virtually encircled, and the war of nerves had begun.

The enemy was not far away – on three fronts.

The Bible says (vs. 9) they “scorned” the children of Israel and “despised” them.
The Hebrew term for scorn means “to utter repeatedly words of derision”

This type of attacking is very difficult thing to handle and it often proves effective when it is used against those who are young in the faith, or just starting out.

They used a demoralizing technique. They wanted to frighten the Jews – paralyze them.

Now, one of their remarks in particular was used to frighten the Jews.

They suggested that the Jews were rebelling against the king.

That weapon had worked once before (see Ezra 4).

Now, Sanballet, Tobiah, and Geshem knew that Nehemiah had the credentials and permission to do it, but they wanted to implant the seeds of doubt.

They are trying to undermine Nehemiah.

If they could take Nehemiah out, they could take the project out.

They are trying to short-circuit his start.

The enemy is good at planting seeds of doubt. Satan used it on Eve.

This was part of their tactics to dishearten the Jews.

Jesus also suffered ridicule . . . on many occasions; they mocked Him (Luke 22:63-64; 23:11), and we can expect to face the same kind of opposition.

So, Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem scoffed at that little group of Jews.

In this book, Nehemiah teaches us how to handle the enemy.

Notice now **VS. 20**

The reply of Nehemiah is clear.

He did not appeal to his authority as granted to him by the king.

He spoke of *the God of heaven*.

In the name of God they were going to rebuild the walls.

Notice Nehemiah's retort is by God's name and he puts them in their place.

He drew a sharp distinction between those who are on the Lord's side and those who are not.

There are times when we must draw very strong lines.

No doubt, his robust remarks and attitude to Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem displayed his courage and raised the eyebrows of his people.

Nehemiah knew that he and the people of Jerusalem were doing God's work, and he was not going to listen to anyone actively opposed to what he knew was right.

And furthermore, he did not intend to associate with those who would seek to stop what was obviously of God.

Nehemiah could have dealt with their ridicule in several ways.

He might have ignored it, and sometimes that's the wisest thing to do (Prov. 26:4).

Nehemiah also could have debated with the three enemy leaders and tried to convince them.

But that approach would only have given to the men more opportunity and time to work.

There are sometimes when you will hold your peace, and there are times you will have to speak as a leader.

He faced their verbal abuse with bold words of his own.

"The God of heaven will give us success." . . .

For the sake of the workers, Nehemiah's verbal response to this first opposition was important.

Sometimes, it is not so much speaking to your enemies—it is encouraging your people.

Part of the unwritten job requirements for every leader is the ability to handle criticism.

That's part of the leadership package.

If you never get criticized, chances are you aren't getting anything done.

Anyone who steps into the arena of leadership must be prepared to pay a price.

True leadership exacts a heavy toll on the whole person—and the more effective the leadership, the higher the price!

The leader must soon face the fact that he will be the target of critical darts.

Unpleasant though it may sound, you haven't really led until you have become familiar with the stinging barbs of the critic.

Now Nehemiah did something else that was very important.

Nehemiah issued a get-tough policy at just the right time.

He denied his opponents a share in the work, the land

In his reply, Nehemiah made three things clear:

Rebuilding the wall was God's work;

The Jews were God's servants; and

Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem had no part in the matter.

Sometimes leaders have to negotiate, but there are times when leaders must draw a line and defend it.

Nehemiah rallied the saints.

Let us stand for closing invitation.

Do we have a burden in our hearts for the work God has called us to do?

Are we willing to sacrifice to see it accomplished? Are we patient in planning our work?

Do we enlist the help of others or try to do everything ourselves?

Do we motivate people on the basis of the spiritual—what God is doing—or simply on the basis of the personal?

Do we listen to what our leaders say as they share their burdens?

Do we cling to the past or desire to see God do something new?

Do we put our hands and necks to the work?

Are we cooperating in any way with the enemy and thus weakening the work?

Folks, we are going to see God's hands at work through human hands

Again we see the relation between God's enablement and man's involvement.

Nehemiah's balanced perspective on the human and divine was one of his strongest traits as a spiritual leader.

Folks, the work we do is God's work—be encouraged.

Maybe you're here and you are not a part of God's team

You can be → give Gospel