

## Read

Nehemiah 4:1-23

4 But it so happened, when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, that he was furious and very indignant, and mocked the Jews. 2 And he spoke before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, “What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they fortify themselves? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they complete it in a day? Will they revive the stones from the heaps of rubbish—*stones* that are burned?”

3 Now Tobiah the Ammonite *was* beside him, and he said, “Whatever they build, if even a fox goes up *on it*, he will break down their stone wall.”

4 Hear, O our God, for we are despised; turn their reproach on their own heads, and give them as plunder to a land of captivity! 5 Do not cover their iniquity, and do not let their sin be blotted out from before You; for they have provoked *You* to anger before the builders.

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

7 Now it happened, when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the walls of Jerusalem were being restored and the gaps were beginning to be closed, that they became very angry, 8 and all of them conspired together to come *and* attack Jerusalem and create confusion. 9 Nevertheless we made our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night.

10 Then Judah said, “The strength of the laborers is failing, and *there is* so much rubbish that we are not able to build the wall.”

11 And our adversaries said, “They will neither know nor see anything, till we come into their midst and kill them and cause the work to cease.”

12 So it was, when the Jews who dwelt near them came, that they told us ten times, “From whatever place you turn, *they will be* upon us.”

13 Therefore I positioned *men* behind the lower parts of the wall, at the openings; and I set the people according to their families, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. 14 And I looked, and arose and said to the nobles, to the leaders, and to the rest of the people, “Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses.”

15 And it happened, when our enemies heard that it was known to us, and *that* God had brought their plot to nothing, that all of us returned to the wall,

everyone to his work. 16 So it was, from that time on, *that* half of my servants worked at construction, while the other half held the spears, the shields, the bows, and *wore* armor; and the leaders *were* behind all the house of Judah. 17 Those who built on the wall, and those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon. 18 Every one of the builders had his sword girded at his side as he built. And the one who sounded the trumpet *was* beside me.

19 Then I said to the nobles, the rulers, and the rest of the people, “The work *is* great and extensive, and we are separated far from one another on the wall. 20 Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us.”

21 So we labored in the work, and half of *the men* held the spears from daybreak until the stars appeared. 22 At the same time I also said to the people, “Let each man and his servant stay at night in Jerusalem, that they may be our guard by night and a working party by day.” 23 So neither I, my brethren, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me took off our clothes, *except* that everyone took them off for washing.

[The New King James Version](#) (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Ne 4:1–23.

Welcome to God’s word for you. A ministry of Sharon R P. Church in South East Iowa. We want to thank you for listening today, and we pray that you’ll be blessed by both hearing God’s word as well as having it applied to your life and your heart.

Well, please turn over in your Bibles with me to the Book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah is just after First and Second Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah. Nehemiah, chapter four, and we’ll be looking at the entirety of this chapter this morning. So Nehemiah chapter four. You can find Nehemiah four on page 430 of your provided pew Bibles. Here now the reading of God’s word.

1 But it so happened, when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, that he was furious and very indignant, and mocked the Jews. 2 And he spoke before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, “What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they fortify themselves? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they complete it in a day? Will they revive the stones from the heaps of rubbish—stones that are burned?” 3 Now Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, “Whatever they build, if even a fox goes up on it, he will break down their stone wall.”

4 Hear, O our God, for we are despised; turn their reproach on their own heads, and give them as plunder to a land of captivity! 5 Do not cover their iniquity, and do not let their sin be blotted out from before You; for they have provoked You to anger before the builders. 6 So we built the wall, and the entire wall was joined together up to half its height, for the people had a mind to work. 7 Now it happened, when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the walls of Jerusalem were being restored and the gaps were beginning to be closed, that they became very angry, 8 and all of them conspired together to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion. 9 Nevertheless we made our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night. 10 Then Judah said, “The strength of the

laborers is failing, and there is so much rubbish that we are not able to build the wall.” 11 And our adversaries said, “They will neither know nor see anything, till we come into their midst and kill them and cause the work to cease.” 12 So it was, when the Jews who dwelt near them came, that they told us ten times, “From whatever place you turn, they will be upon us.” 13 Therefore I positioned men behind the lower parts of the wall, at the openings; and I set the people according to their families, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. 14 And I looked, and arose and said to the nobles, to the leaders, and to the rest of the people, “Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses.” 15 And it happened, when our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had brought their plot to nothing, that all of us returned to the wall, everyone to his work. 16 So it was, from that time on, that half of my servants worked at construction, while the other half held the spears, the shields, the bows, and wore armor; and the leaders were behind all the house of Judah. 17 Those who built on the wall, and those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon. 18 Every one of the builders had his sword girded at his side as he built. And the one who sounded the trumpet was beside me. 19 Then I said to the nobles, the rulers, and the rest of the people, “The work is great and extensive, and we are separated far from one another on the wall. 20 Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us.” 21 So we labored in the work, and half of the men held the spears from daybreak until the stars appeared. 22 At the same time I also said to the people, “Let each man and his servant stay at night in Jerusalem, that they may be our guard by night and a working party by day.” 23 So neither I, my brethren, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me took off our clothes, except that everyone took them off for washing.

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God endures forever.

I remember talking to a man I was discipling and as he and I were working more and more on issues and sins in his life that he needed to put to death. One day he and I were talking on the phone and I just called him to check up. How is it going? He said you want me to be honest with you? And I said, yeah, go ahead, be honest with me, man. He said, I’m really tired. It seems like the harder and harder I work at this holiness stuff, the harder and harder it gets. And I’m just worn down. I keep trying and I keep trying and I keep trying, and I’m, I’m worried I’m going to fail. I said of course you’re tired because you are working. But there’s a key thing you’ve missed here, and it’s the Lord. It is the Lord you need to be relying on and not your own strength.

See, God is going to protect you, Christian. God is going to protect you. Yeah, you’re gonna work, but when we work, we rely on the Lord. And that starts this reality that Nehemiah shows us here, starts with people really upset that God is actually carrying for the people. Look at verses one through three with me. What happens when Sanballat and Tobiah find out that the Jews are building the wall and it’s, it’s getting success? Sanballat mocks them. He hears that we’re rebuilding the wall, that he was furious and very indignant and mocked the Jews. Don’t be surprised, Christians, when people mock you. All you need to do is turn on comedy news shows and they will mock Christians for seeing the church built up. Go ahead and turn on the news channels that are that are purposely meant to bring the news, but in a mocking way and you will see them making fun of Christians. This isn’t a joke, I’m serious. This is one of the ways I like to kind of keep my finger on the pulse of what’s going on in our culture is watching these shows

and seeing people make fun of Christians when they have success or make fun of Christians when they are standing up for what they believe the Lord desires. Don't be surprised when people are indignant towards you and mock you. But he does more than that. He assembles his brethren in the army and he says, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they fortify themselves? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they complete it in a day? Will they revive the stones from the heap of rubbish—stones that are burned?"

Sanballat's mocking in front of all of his troops. They're mustered together and he's trying to belittle the people of God. But he's got his yes man next to him. You know that guy, right? Yeah, yeah, yeah, what he said, yeah, that guy. That's what Tobiah the Ammonite does right next to him in verse three. Look at verse three, what he says. He goes on and he doesn't even just, you know, what he said was right. He says even if a fox went up on their wall, it would just fall down. Right, he's saying those stupid Jews, they don't even know how to build a wall. They aren't actually the people of God. God doesn't bless them. He's just gonna let that wall fall down. We don't even need a buildup siege works against. All we need to do is tap a stone and the whole thing will fall down like Jericho's wall. It's just gonna fall.

Don't be surprised when people belittle your faith. Don't be surprised when the enemies of God are going to try to belittle your faith, belittle your confidence in the Lord. It's going to happen. Some of you know this in an intimate way because you've seen your family member do it. I was just told of a man who walked with the Lord for a long time, has a whole host of kids and he's left the faith and now calls his wife's faith and his children's faith foolishness. Don't be surprised when people think that you're a fool for Christ. So what? So what? It's gonna happen. But what does Nehemiah do in response in face, in the face of this opposition of what's happening as they're building the wall and he's doing God's work and he hears about them mocking him. He doesn't argue with them, he goes straight to the chief in prayer. Look with me at verses four and five. "Hear O our God, for we are despised, turn their approach on their own heads, and give them as plunder to a land of captivity. Do not cover their iniquity, and do not let their sin be blotted out from before You; for they have provoked You to anger before the builders." Nehemiah here is praying a prophet's prayer. Nehemiah here is praying Lord, they are set against You. They're set against Your ways. Your kingdom needs to come. Your will needs to be done here on earth and you need to do this work. Turn the reproach on their own heads. But Christian, this is for you. This is not your prayer.

As I was working through this text I was wrestling with how does this line up with what Jesus tells us to do? Blessed are you when they hate you and persecute you for My name's sake. Pray for those who persecute you. This isn't negating what Nehemiah does here. What the Bible calls you to do in the age of Christ is something far more difficult. And that there are people who are going to call you a fool, mock you to your face, back talk you behind your back. And you're to pray for them. When your spouse says why are you wasting your time doing that? You pray for them and you care for them. Will you go straight to the chief when persecution and opposition comes? But in the midst of this Nehemiah prays and he prays, and he, he asked God to continue the work. And in verse six, that's what happens. Look at verse six with me. "So we built the wall and the entire wall was joined together up to half its height, for the people had a mind to work". The people had a mind to work; the wall is now enclosed. All around the city. It's encompassed,

most of it. The gates have not been hung yet. There's still work to do, but it's half its height. The work is continuing. Why? Because God has given the people a mind to do the work.

Brothers and sisters, God has given you work to do in your Christian walk. Have a mind to do that work. Zero in on it and put your shoulder into it. That's what all last week was about. But just because there is progress on the wall, we should not think, we should not think that that would hinder or sorry, just because there's persecution against the work of the wall doesn't mean we think that the work should slow down. It's this paradox that happens. Again and again in history, this is just a history lesson for you, right? In ancient Rome, they tried to stomp out Christianity. And what happened? It flourished. When the Chinese government in the 1960s during the Cultural Revolution tried to stomp out Christianity. Guess what's happened? There are more Christians now in China than there have ever been in the history in the entire world. Every time this world tries to stomp out the gospel, God flourishes the church. This is what happens and we shouldn't be surprised. This is what Jesus tells us. Next week or in two weeks, we're going to get to that, how Jesus tells us that we should not be surprised if the world hated Him, of course, they're going to hate us.

And this conspiracy continues in verses seven and eight. All around them, all the people from Samaria up in the north, to Amon in the west, to the Arabs in the south and to Ashdod on the east. Nehemiah is giving us a bird's eye view down on Judah, and he's saying, all of our enemies all around us, they're all looking to try to kill us. They're all looking to try to put us to an end. But what does verse nine say? What does the first part of verse nine say against all those enemies? "Nevertheless, we made our prayers to God". When the persecution comes, when the pressure is upon you, when the heat starts to turn up, what should be our first response? Nevertheless, we prayed. Notice it's not nevertheless I pray. This is no longer Nehemiah's individual words here. But the Bible tells us that they all prayed. We prayed. Indeed, may that be the mark of Sharon R.P. Church that when people would look at us and they would see all these bad things were happening in all of their lives and it seemed like everything was going wrong with these people, but yet they prayed. See, God's house is meant to be a house of prayer. We rely on God in the midst of any circumstance and trial.

But they don't just sit there. What's the second half of verse nine? "Nevertheless, we made our prayer to God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night". We pray and we do. Let me say that again. We pray and we do. Can you imagine somebody praying, Lord, give me this day my daily bread and then sitting down on their tush playing Xbox all day and wondering why is my belly so hungry. I prayed for that food. Why isn't my doorbell ringing? I mean, where's the take-out here? If you live in the country, there ain't no take out. You gotta even go get it. But where's...that's, that's not logical. But we pray that by his providence and by his deeds that he would bring about the situations that we could live our lives faithfully to him. And so what did they do in the second half of verse nine? They pray and they set a watch. They put people up on the wall to look out for the enemies when they might be coming. But in this, as we continue in this third set what we find out, it's a little bit more about the heart of the people. Look with me at verse 10. "Then Judah said, The strength of the laborers, the strength of laborers is failing, and there is so much rubbish that we are not able to build the wall". The people are tired, people are tired. Think about it. Have you ever tried to move big stones before? Some of you have done landscaping around your house. Have you ever tried to pick up stones that wide

and that and that tall and tried and tried to pick them up and stack them on top of each other? Imagine doing that all day from sunrise to sunset. It's physically exhausting. They're building this wall. Again, I need you to get the picture in your mind that these are people in clothes that are soaked with sweat. These are people who are working in a dusty land, and as they sweat, the salt drips into their eyes and they have streaks possibly coming down their face from the sweat mixed in with the dust. And they're straining to put these, these rocks on one after another after another for day after day after day after day.

And those of Judah come to Nehemiah and they say the workers' strength is failing. They're getting tired. Have you not experienced this in your own life? Have you not felt this in your own life? You're just tired. You've tried to serve God by caring for your family. You've tried to love your spouse day in and day out, emptying of yourself, pouring out of your heart for that person, denying yourself. It's hard and you feel like you have nothing left. When you see the needs in the body of Christ and you see your brothers and sisters in need and you're tired. When you have pains in your body and you're tired — brothers and sisters, Christ is there for you. Galatians 6:9 tells us "Do not grow weary of doing good". It is tiring. And if you are resting in anything other than Jesus Christ as a wellspring to give you strength, you're relying on yourself and you're going to fail. Go to Christ when you're tired. Cling to him. Be vulnerable with others and tell them like the rulers here were able to see, they're tired. They're tired, but it's...it's more than just being tired. They're tired and there's opposition against them. Verse 12 or sorry verse 10 "And our adversaries said they will neither see anything, neither see nor know anything till we come into their midst and kill them and cause the work to cease". So they're saying they're tired. The wall is only half built. And now when they go out to work, what do they do? They go out to work on the wall and who do they see gathering in the distance? They see the Samaritan army. They see the Ammonites, they see the Ashdodites. They see the Arabs. They see the enemies of God coming to fight them. They are already tired, how can they possibly face a battle when they can't even pick up stones? How will they pick up a sword and go into bloody warfare if they are tired because they can't even build a wall and then the work's only half done. A half-done wall doesn't keep anyone out of a city. How is, how are they ever going to protect themselves? And the enemy says it. The enemy whispers these lies into their ear. We're going to come into the city and we're going to destroy it and you won't even know what happened to you. Man, Satan loves to whisper those lies into your ear. How will you know that you'll last until the last day? Man, what if I took your health away? What if one of your children died? I bet you wouldn't believe then. I bet you're not even strong enough to stand up to the attack. Man, Satan loves to whisper those lies into our ear. But what do they do? What do the people of God do?

Well the reality is in verse 12 that they're afraid. "So it was when the Jews who dwelt near them came, that they told us time and again or 10 times from whatever place you turn, they will be upon us". See, the Jews are not only tired, they're demoralized. They're afraid. What are we going to do? This is a dangerous position for Nehemiah. The people are only half done with the work and already they're tired and the morale is gone. This is something we know all too well. This is something many of you know all too well as you were raising and are raising children and grandchildren. And you know the work is far more than you could ever do. The work is too much for you. You know that you cannot raise Godly children because it's only the Spirit of the Lord who finally blesses that work. You pour yourself out, you're scared for your children's future. You're scared for what lies ahead for your marriage. What do you do?

The hard reality that in our community people face, so it's going on right now outside, there are fields that should be getting harvested, and yet the Lord is bringing rain. The market prices are low. You've been trying for decades to care for your family, and yet no matter how hard you work, it seems like there's never enough to cover all the bills and the debt keeps coming year after year. And what happens when everything is gone? What do you do? The business owner who's tired and has poured in year after year, hours upon thousands upon thousands of hours, building their business, living out the principles of their Christian faith in that business only to get hit with a citation from a human rights council and their business is slapped with a lawsuit big enough to strip them of every bit of money that they have. What do they do? Where do you run to? What do you do as church members when you have worked, labored for year after year after year after year in the congregation to see it built up and it never seems that the wall is above half built. And we get scared. What happens? Will God let the wall fall? These are real fears and real anxieties that creep into our hearts that will demoralize us. But what did they do?

Look with me at verses 13 and 14 at Nehemiah's words. "Therefore I positioned men behind the lower parts of the wall, at the openings; and I set the people according to their families, with their swords, with their spears and their bows. And I looked, and arose and said to the nobles, to the leaders, and to the rest of the people, do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, remember your sons and your daughters and your wives and your houses". Where do we go to in this world for strength? Brothers and sisters remember the Lord. What does Nehemiah do? He gathers together the people by their families. He gathers the whole congregation together at the opening so that all the enemies of God can see them mustered together and they show strength together. And as they are together, they are reminded, remember the Lord. That is what we come here to do every Sunday. You need this in your life. Every week. Every week you need brought together, and you need to be told remember the Lord who is great and awesome. You should not rely on yourself. It is the Lord who fights for you. It is the Lord who cares for you. It is the Lord who is awesome. It is the Lord who can bring your children to faith. It is the Lord who can save our communities. It is the Lord alone who we can rest on and tell the devil to pack his bags and take his stupid life and get him out of my ear. Are you relying on the great and awesome Lord? Or are you still trying to build the wall of your faith by yourself?

Brothers and sisters, we gather together as Nehemiah gathered the people in the breaches of the wall where the weak point is and we do it to encourage one another every week. That is what Hebrews 10 tells us that we are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, that we might encourage one another because as you stand shoulder to shoulder sitting next to each other in the pews, you realize, I'm not alone. God has a people and we stick together and we love each other and we fight for each other in prayer. And we care for one another when we're wounded. And we love one another with a selfless love relying on God because when the people of God are brought back together, our focus is reoriented upward instead of our problems here. See the Lord will protect you. He will protect you.

I want you look at what happens. Verses 15 through 18. "And it happened, when our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had brought their plot to nothing, that all of us returned to the wall, everyone to his work". When the enemies of God saw that the people were not going to be disheartened, that the people, even though they were tired, were still going to

fight for one another, were still going to rely on the Lord, their plan came to nothing. And what do they start doing? They get back to work. And all of us return to the wall, everyone to his work. “So it was from that time on that half of my servants work at construction, while the other half held the spears, the shields, the bows and wore armor. And the leaders were behind all the house of Judah. Those who built on the wall and those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other they held a weapon”. As they go to work, there are people who are holding the shields, holding the bows, holding the armor behind, ready for when the battle comes.

Some of you are too tired and are no longer able to do the work that you used to once be able to do, but you are called to sideline – or not sideline, to background work, fighting and caring for the rest of us. I can’t tell you how much joy I get when I visit the shut-ins, and they tell me that they’re praying for you all. They’re no longer able to be here. They’re no longer able to muster with us, encouraging us, to be here to share meals with us and to be able to do what we would consider any work in the church. They’re not fixing lights, they’re not mowing grass or not preparing meals, but day in and day out they’re in their room, praying for you. Day in and day out they are assaulting the enemy of God and asking that you are cared for. The workers have a mind to the work, and now with one hand they do the work, and with the other hand they hold a sword and they labor and they labor, knowing that at any moment the attack can come. But they build and they’re ready to fight. Brothers and sisters, God is telling you he’s going to protect you. Be ready to build, but you need to be ready to fight. We build with the armor of God on us. With a helmet of salvation, with a breastplate of righteousness, with that shield of faith; with that sword of the Spirit, the word of God and our feet shod with a gospel of peace. We work. We work relying on Him. And this is what he says Nehemiah again, in the last few verses 19 through 23. “Then I said to the nobles, the rulers and the rest of the people, the work is great and extensive and we are separated far from one another on the wall. Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet rally to us there. Our God will fight for us.” Let me say that again. Our God will fight for us. If we were in a Baptist church, you guys should have said, Amen. Your God will fight for you. “So we labored in the work and half the men held the spears from daybreak until the stars appeared. At the same time I also said to the people, Let each man and his servant stay at night in Jerusalem, that they may be our guard and by night and a working party by day. So neither I, nor my brethren, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me took off our clothes, except that everyone took them off for washing.”

Nehemiah and his men ain’t playing here. These are some tired men willing to do tiresome work. And they’re ready to stink. Daybreak to the end of day, doing God’s work. Relying on him to fight for them. Brothers and sisters, God will fight for you. God will protect you. We need each other in this fight. We need mutual encouragement in this fight. And as we build the wall of our faith as we see God build up the church and as he builds His kingdom, we also need to remember that we need a hand on that sword, ready for when that persecution and opposition comes. But always confidence that he is the Lord, great and awesome. Let’s pray.

Oh Lord, we thank you so much that You, that You care for us. Thank You for Your great love and Your great mercy. God, please give us strength. Thank you that you have plans for us, plans not to harm us, but to prosper us. Thank you, Lord, that we need not be anxious about anything, but we can be overwhelmed with thanks and that Your Holy Spirit will give us peace. Lord,



thank you that You know every hair upon our heads. You know the food we need to eat and You love us and You care for us. Father, please protect us. Please, Lord, give us a mind to do the work. Please, Lord, let us rely on You and You alone. In Jesus name, Amen.

Thank you for listening to God's Word for You, a ministry of Sharon R.P. church in Morning Sun, Iowa. We pray that you would be blessed as you grow in your love for God, your love for His word as well as your love for His people. Until next week — God bless you.