

Dealing with Opposition

Nehemiah 4:1-23

INTRO:

Some teach that if we are in the very center of God's will, we will have no storms, no troubles, and no trials, just smooth sailing. The problem is this just isn't true. In fact, many times it is stormiest right in the center of God's will. Remember when Jesus and his disciples got in the boat and started across the Sea of Galilee? Our Lord fell asleep in the boat and suddenly a storm came up. No question that they were absolutely in the center of God's will and yet they were in the storm of their lives. Jesus rebuked the storm and it was calm again. Storms are not uncommon in the life a believer any more than they are uncommon in the life of an unbeliever. The difference is, we have the Lord Jesus in the boat.

Nehemiah was no stranger to storms. No sooner did the people of God began to build the wall around Jerusalem, Sanballet and Tobiah, reared their ugly heads. They opposed everything Nehemiah and the people did. We find here a principle we need to get down: whenever you are seeking to do a work for God there will be opposition. This is true whether it be building the walls of Jerusalem, building a church in Lansing, or building a love for the Lord in your family. Knowing this to be true, it behooves us to learn from Nehemiah how to handle opposition

I. The Practice of The Opposition (v. 1-3; 7-8; 10; 11-12)

II. The Principles For Overcoming (v. 4-6; 9; 16b; 13-23)

I. The Practice of The Opposition (V. 1-3; 7-8; 10; 11-12)

Nehemiah 4:1-3 “But it so happened, when Sanballet heard that we were rebuilding the wall, that he was furious and very indignant, and mocked the Jews. 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?’ 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.’

v.7-8 “Now it happened, when Sanballet, 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, and all of them conspired together to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion.”

v.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.”*

vs.11-12 *“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.’ 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.’”*

A. If we are going to overcome our opposition with the Lord’s help, the first thing we must do is to recognize their tactics. There are four basic tools Satan loves to employ against us.

1. Before we look at the tools let me focus on the motive of the opposition. Why were Sanballet and Tobiah upset? They were troubled because the walls were going up. God's work was going forward.

2. It is important to recognize it is Satan who motivates the opposition.

B. (v. 1-3) The first tactic the opposition used was DOUBT. This tool employs questions and scorn. Doubt involves two dimensions. First they attack the motives and adequacy of those who are working. They scorned of the quality of the work. **[1]** Sanballet begins by questioning their competency to do the work. This really hurts when we doubt our own ability. **[2]** Then he hinted their God was not able to help them. *“Will they sacrifice?”* (Do they really think God will help them?) This too is not a new tactic. Rabshakeh tried it. *“Who is the LORD that He will deliver you?”* God is always sufficient and is willing to help. **[3]** The next part of this tactic is just as devious as the first. He scorned the work done. Scorn is designed to make that which is accomplished look insignificant (v.3).

C. Tactic number two is DECEIT (v.7-8). Frequently when the first tool fails to stop the work, tool number two is brought to bear. The opposition sought out others of a like mind to "conspire" to hinder the work. This again is not a new tool, the Pharisees did this against Jesus. Beware of secret meetings. If it is done in darkness you can almost be certain it isn't inspired by the 'Father of lights.'

D. If DOUBT doesn't stop us, the enemy will try DECEIT. If that doesn't work, then out will come the heavy artillery DISCOURAGEMENT (v.10). This is the first of the two heavy guns of the enemy. This is internal opposition and it begins with the tongue. Listen to the complaint of the men of Judah. *“Our muscles are sore, our strength is gone, our work has accomplished little THEREFORE it can't be done. Let's quit!”* The truth of the matter was at that very moment the walls were half done (v.6).

E. (vs.11-12) The final tool here is again one that is designed to work internally. This is the tool of DESPAIR. Sanballet, Tobiah and company were threatening to attack the work and to bring it to a halt by force. The threats created a real response of fear in the hearts of the people.

F. Now that we have a feel for how the opposition operates, let us look at how Nehemiah handled the opposition.

II. The Principles For Overcoming (v. 4-6; 9; 16b; 13: 23)

A. how did Nehemiah deal with doubt?

“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! 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.’ 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.” (v. 4-6)

[1] The first thing he did was to pray. When Satan has us in his sights and begins to shoot at us this should always be our first response. Our problem is we have lost sight of the importance and power of prayer. Satan is stronger than we are. With the Lord's help through prayer, we can conquer Him. (Notice how he prayed. He gave the feelings to God and let Him deal with the situation). **[2]** Now that we have prayed there is something else we need to do. (v.6) we must get on with the work. Satan does his best to get us to stop the work. If we stop, he has won. Whatever you do, never give Satan what he wants. Spiritual stubbornness is a virtue.

B. Tactic number two to overcome is DECEIT. How do we answer the tool of deceit?
v.9 ***“Nevertheless we made our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night.”***

[1] Pray. Really? Again? Yes, the first line of defense against opposition is prayer. **[2]** Set a guard. Sometimes there is nothing we can do to stop the opposition from gathering forces, but we can set a guard to make sure that the attack is not valid and keep doing the work.

C. Dealing with DISCOURAGEMENT involves first an awareness that the problem doesn't come from the Sanballets and Tobiahs on the outside, but from the Christians who criticize the work on the inside. **[1]** The first step is to ignore the criticism. Notice there is no response recorded to the statement of **verse 10**. The Bible speaks of what we may term criticism in four ways: exhortation, admonition, reproof, and rebuke. The criteria which puts criticism in one of these categories is the motive for the criticism. If it is given to edify a brother, and is said directly to that brother it is Biblical. If you are exhorted, admonished, reproved, or rebuked, listen and seek to profit from the input. If, however, the criticism is not in one of these categories, or is not offered directly to you, the criticism is sin. You are to ignore it

and get back to work. People who are not busy working forfeit the right to criticize those who are working.

D. Finally, we need to overcome fear, if we are to defeat DESPAIR.

vs.13-14 *“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. 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.’”*

Nehemiah did three things. **[1]** First, he pointed them to the LORD. He recited some truths about Him. (How many promises do you know?)

Psalm 56:3 *“What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee”*

Trust replaces fear. **[2]** He fortified the defenses. Nehemiah laid out a plan to follow in case the worst happened. **[3]** He kept at the work.

Summing all of this up

How do we handle the opposition? Nehemiah teaches us, it really involves three things: KEEP PRAYING, KEEP TRUSTING, and KEEP WORKING.

We do this and we can expect God to keep blessing.

Joy in Serving Jesus