

Fighting the Finished Fight

Nehemiah 4:13-23

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Note: The text below was prepared for oral delivery rather than for publication in print. As such, be aware that sentence fragments are intentionally used and that this document has not been edited to correct the errors in grammar, sentence structure, etc.

I. **Introduction:**

- A. I've titled today's message "Fighting the Finished Fight." The genesis for this message came from a story recorded for us in Nehemiah, chapter 4. And as we proceed, I think you will see how, like those in today's story, how believers engage to fight what, in a sense, can accurately be described as fighting a finished fight.
- B. I encourage you to read the broader context of this passage on your own, but in the interest of time, let me set the stage for you by summarizing what is taking place prior to and in the first part of Nehemiah 4. As this book opens, the wall around the city of Jerusalem lay in ruins, having been previously torn down and all the gates had been burned. In the opening chapters you'll discover that under Nehemiah's leadership the Jews had begun to rebuild the wall from the ruins and the rubble.

Now the enemies in the area surrounding Jerusalem were at this time coexisting peaceably with the Jews. However, they apparently took consolation in the vulnerability of the Jews, presuming that with no wall to protect them they could take them over whenever they pleased. And in Nehemiah 4 we learn that these enemies conspired to stop the building of the wall, plotting to attack the Jews before it could be finished. They initially mocked the Jews, assuming that the work would soon stop on its own due to the scarcity of materials, the difficulty of working among the rubbish and ruins, and perhaps a presumption of such shoddy workmanship that whatever they erected would not stand. But as the chapter progresses, these enemies learned that the work on the wall had actually progressed successfully and they became angry. So in hopes of stopping the work before the wall became too formidable to breach, they all conspired together to mount a sneak attack and slay the builders in order to prevent the work from being completed.

Well fortunately, or providentially, there were sympathetic Jews that lived in the countryside outside of Jerusalem. Although these were not helping their fellow Jews build the wall, they did have enough loyalty and concern toward them so as to tip them off, having heard of the planned sneak attack. They told them that whatever direction you turn toward, they will be attacking, relating that they had to be on guard on all sides. And so having just heard this news, we pick up in verse 13 with Nehemiah saying....

II. Text: Nehemiah 4:13-23:

“Therefore set I in the lower places behind the wall, and on the higher places, I even set the people after their families with their swords, their spears, and their bows.

¹⁴And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses. ¹⁵And it came to pass, when our enemies heard that it was known unto us, and God had brought their counsel to nought, that we returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work. *<The enemies having lost the element of surprise>*

¹⁶And it came to pass from that time forth, that the half of my servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons; *<a coat of mail / armor, protecting the neck and chest areas>* and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah. ¹⁷They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. *<Likely not literally, but indicating that they all took part, rotating from standing guard to working>* ¹⁸For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. And he that sounded the trumpet was by me.

¹⁹And I said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, The work is great and large, and we are separated upon the wall, one far from another. ²⁰In what place therefore ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us: our God shall fight for us. ²¹So we laboured in the work: and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared. ²²Likewise at the same time said I unto the people, Let every one with his servant lodge within Jerusalem, that in the night they may be a guard to us, and labour on the day. ²³So neither I, nor my brethren, nor my servants, nor the men of the guard which followed me, none of us put off our clothes, saving that every one put them off for washing.”

III. Application to us:

A. As we just read in verse 20, Nehemiah told his fellow workers, “...***our God shall fight for us.***” And yet, they took up weapons, prepared to engage in the battle, all the while knowing that if the almighty, invincible God who had delivered their nation so many times in the past was fighting for them, that the outcome was assured. It was as people like to say, as good as over. They were engaging to fight a “finished fight” so to speak because there is no possibility of failure or defeat if God is fighting for us.

1. For as God revealed to Nebuchadnezzar, as recorded in Daniel 4:35, “...*all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?*”
 2. As God said through the prophet Isaiah in Isa. 46:9-11 “*Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me,* ¹⁰*Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:* ¹¹*Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it.*” God doesn’t lose!
 3. As Proverbs 19:21 teaches us, “*There are many devices in a man’s heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand.*”
- B. So here Nehemiah assures the people that the almighty God who cannot fail will fight for them. And as such, the outcome would never be in question. And yet, they took up arms. So how does this apply to us today? I believe we see in the response by Nehemiah and his fellow Israelites by their taking up arms, an excellent example of how spiritual Israel (God’s chosen people unto salvation from all nations) are likewise motivated to engage in a spiritual battle as soldiers of the cross – to fight the ‘as-good-as-finished’ battle. It’s as good as finished for true believers because they too have God fighting for them. “...*If God be for us, who can be against us?*” (Romans 8:31). So why do we do anything in the way of obedience and service and evangelism? The outcome is certain. As the angel told Joseph as the time of our Savior’s birth approached, “...*and thou shalt call his name JESUS: (Jehovah who saves) for he shall save his people (spiritual Israel from their enemy) from their sins.*” (Matt. 1:21b)
- C. Now many sincere, religious folks are never confronted with the issue that seems to always confront those who hear the true gospel of God’s sovereign grace. As you may surmise, I’m speaking of the issue that initially confronts us as we naturally attempt to rationalize the sovereignty of God on one hand, with the responsibility of the sinner on the other, as it pertains to the truth of the gospel, of how God saves sinners. I know that one of my earliest thoughts upon first hearing God’s gospel would have found its voice so as to raise an objection in some form like this: “If what you’re saying is true, then why should I do anything. If you’re saying that my faith, my profession, my response, my obedience, etc. has no causal role in my obtaining or maintain my salvation, then why are you even bothering to preach or evangelize? Why not lay down your arms? Why not shut the door and go home? If God is sovereign in salvation as you say, then it doesn’t matter what I do. I’m reduced to nothing more than a mindless robot.”

- D. And these sentiments are pretty much second nature to us as fallen, ungodly sinners proceeding on a presumed way towards heaven that seems right to us, but which Proverbs teaches us is a way that ends in death. Which way ends in death? The way that seemed right to us by nature. What seems right? Surely there is something that I must do. Oh they say, “I believe it is all of Christ, BUT you must believe, accept Him, and profess Him before men in order to be saved.”
- E. Well, that’s not grace – that is not salvation unmerited by you, the object of mercy. Rather, salvation by God’s grace is solely a result of the satisfaction to God’s justice rendered by the Savior as a Substitute for His people – His merits, His righteousness, being made the sinner’s by imputation, God charging that righteousness to their account in the same way He was made to be sin, God charging the demerit of the sins of His people to the Lord Jesus Christ that He, who knew no sin, might bear the penalty due unto them in His death on the cross (2 Cor. 5:21).
- F. So, knowing that the gospel proclaims a sure and certain salvation for each and everyone for whom Christ lived and died, knowing that when He cried out on the cross “It is finished,” it truly was, knowing that the victory over sin and Satan was realized by His vicarious work (that means it got the job done, justifying each and every sinner for whose sins He died), then what motive is there for us to obey? Why do we bother to share the gospel? Why are we witnesses of the gospel if it is sure and certain as our Lord Himself declared in John 6:37-40 that, “***All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*** ³⁸*For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.* ³⁹*And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.*” After all, the fight (the battle waged against sin and Satan) is finished, so why do we engage as soldiers and ambassadors for Christ?
- G. Well, first let’s consider the battle believers wage. There is the sense where all believers are engaged in the internal battle of the flesh and the spirit due to the sin principle that remains present until we leave this body of death. But that fight is as good as finished, for the condemning power of that sin has been removed by the finished work of Christ for all of His sheep, insuring for each of them that even the presence of sin shall be removed in heaven’s glory. But also there is the battle waged for the truth of the gospel which proclaims this finished work of Christ as the sole ground of a sinner’s salvation. This is the battle or warfare Paul describes in 2 Cor. 10:3-5 when he wrote, “***For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: ⁴(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)* ⁵*Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;*”**

- H. And this fight likewise has been finished by the obedience of Christ – His obedience unto death, even the death of the cross. And yet believers are commanded and exhorted to engage in this warfare, declaring and spreading the glorious gospel message wherein this obedience, His righteousness, is revealed.
- I. Well, apart from God-given spiritual life in the new birth, we simply can't fathom why we should do anything in the way of obedience or service to God unless it is a determining factor in the salvation of a sinner. We imagine that surely there must be something we can and must do to be found in God's favor and avoid His wrath. And to imagine that, is to insist that by such a work, a holy God can save a sinner in sharp contradiction to the scriptural truth of Eph. 2:8-9 that it is "... ***by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: ⁹Not of works, lest any man should boast.*** But right after having said it is not of works, Paul continues in verse 10 saying, "***For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.***" God has ordained that believers, His sheep, walk a spiritual walk of good works, that we fight the finished fight, so to speak.
- J. You know, there are only 2 religions, works and grace. And you're engaged in the battle on one side of the other. According to our natural way of thinking, we object to the notion that our standing before God isn't affected to some degree by our character and conduct. As self-righteous sinners, we know that our primary incentive to obey God would be removed if we bought into the idea that our character and conduct had no bearing on our standing before God. Consider how this reasoning so clearly proves how self-absorbed and consumed with self-love we all are by nature. From our sinful perspective we naturally conclude, "If my obedience actually has no bearing upon my acceptance before God, then I am left with no valid motive to even try to obey God." And this is a reasonable conclusion in light of the religion of man, the religion of works, which typically majors on trying to motivate sinners to sin less by working upon fallen man's natural feelings of guilt, fear of punishment and death, and his natural mercenary desire for gain and reward. Such an emphasis in pulpits across our land only serves to strengthen the lost sinner's sinful resolve to establish a righteousness of his or her own. In Romans 7:5, God calls such widely respected efforts evil and "fruit unto death."
- K. So why then do any fight the finished fight? It's because born again believers are not left without a valid motive. These natural motives are replaced with a far nobler motive to obey God. The believing sinner now strives to perform many of the same deeds as does the moral, but lost, religionist—only now from a motive of grace and gratitude. He obediently acts, not in order that he might gain God's favor or remove His disfavor, but rather from a new principle of grace and gratitude, as one who's standing before God cannot be improved.

L. Based upon righteousness imputed, the justified sinner is truly one with Christ! A born again sinner discovers that those same efforts to do that which was right prior to true spiritual conversion, though outwardly praiseworthy among men, were an affront to a holy God in that they were placed in a position of rivalry with the work of Christ Himself, whose perfect righteousness alone gains favor before God. He now sees these efforts as God does, as “dead works” to be repented of (Hebrews 9:14).

IV. Philippians 1:27ff: (Look with me now in Philippians 1)

A. In Paul’s letter to the Philippians in chapter 1, verse 21, he said, “***For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.***” And he goes on to say he is torn between the two, yet he knows that to stay with them, ministering to them, fighting the finished fight was needful. And look at his words beginning in verse 27 where he writes, “***Only let your conversation*** <that means your conduct and character of life, your citizenship> ***be as it becometh the gospel of Christ:*** <that’s the gospel of grace, based on the finished work of Christ> ***that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;***²⁸ ***And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God.***²⁹ ***For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake;***³⁰ ***Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me.***”

B. So first, we see that this is an evidence of salvation, to be about the ministry of the gospel, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, engaged in the battle – a gift to suffer for his sake. When Peter and the apostles were cast into prison and taken before the counsel of Gamaliel, as they left we read in Acts 5:41, “***And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.***⁴² ***And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.***” They preached Christ because it’s His righteousness imputed that counted them worthy to suffer.

V. So, as we see, we fight the finished fight (1) because the believer is given a new **motive** of grace and gratitude. But secondly, just as our sovereign God declares the end from the beginning, this God “***...who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:***” (Eph. 1:11), He also has determined the means. So, we also fight the finished fight, knowing God engages His people in the ***means*** He has ordained. So we have both 1) Motive and 2) Engagement in the Means. Consider:

- A. Romans 10:14 where we read, ***“How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?”***
- B. I Cor. 1:21: ***“For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.”***
- C. Paul described the gospel in Romans 1:16-17 as ***“...the power of God unto salvation...for therein is the righteousness of God revealed.”*** That righteousness is the satisfaction rendered by Christ’s obedience unto death. And as we read in, 2 Cor. 10, in a true gospel ministry we are engaged in fighting the finished fight as we cast down imaginations and bring every thought captive to the obedience (the finished work) of Christ.
- D. God is sovereign and has declared the end from the beginning, but He also is a God who has ordained the means, that He might be glorified in the hearts of His people – that they may behold Him as He is, both a just God and a Savior. And what a privilege it is to be an instrument in obedient service to our Lord, employed in the very means He uses to irresistibly, without fail, draw His sheep to Himself.
- E. Consider that in serving in God’s army we can’t lose. This sermon will have its precise, God-directed effect and any and every sermon that sets forth the glorious message of the gospel of God’s sovereign grace will redound to His glory, whether in the just condemnation of those who reject it or graciously in the hearts as He makes Himself known to those who are justified by the blood of Christ. The gospel of grace is edifying to believers as it always points them to not look within, but rather to their Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, to their certain salvation by His finished work on the cross so that Christ is exalted and receives all the preeminence, God is glorified, and all grounds of boasting by the sinner are excluded.

VI. Closing; Reflecting again on the story of Nehemiah 4, note that:

- A. In verse 14, Nehemiah told them, ***“...Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, <feared / revered> and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses.”*** We engage in the ministry, fighting the finished fight for our loved ones. We know that there is no hope for anyone other than those objects of His mercy for whom Christ’s blood was shed, to whom His righteousness is imputed. We don’t know in advance who all is included among these, but we do know with a certainty that for each and every one of them He will use this word of regeneration, the gospel that is the power of God unto salvation, to call them unto to Himself. And so we engage in this warfare because we can’t help but do so, having the love of God shed abroad in our hearts and desiring their like salvation.

B. And then notice in verse 20, when Nehemiah told them, “....***our God shall fight for us.***” The very next phrase is “***So we laboured in the work:...***” Because God is on our side!

You see, when God’s Spirit convinces us (under the preaching of this gospel of grace) of the sin that would otherwise deceive us, (the deceivableness of unrighteousness) and of righteousness as the standard of judgment, we no longer see God’s sovereignty in salvation as eliminating any valid motive to obey and serve Him. No instead, that becomes our motive – a motive of love and gratitude for His great mercy and grace in having first loved us. It is because of our justification in Christ, because He has fought for us, and will continue to bring about all the sure and certain fruits and effects of His victory at the cross in each successive generation, that we serve the Lord with gladness.

Clearly, there is a spiritual warfare that takes place in the respective lifetimes of believers as the fruit and effect of Christ’s victory on the cross is realized for His people. But in contemplating that a sovereign God’s determination to do something makes it so sure and certain that we might consider it is as good as done, does not negate, diminish, or make subordinate in any way the necessity of His determinate will and purpose unfolding in time. Rather it insures it!

And in light of that certainty, and in the specific sense I’ve explained today, believers, in their walk of faith can take great comfort and joy in knowing that they are fighting the finished fight!

Footnote from the author: While this sermon was prepared and delivered by me, I often utilize the commentaries, study helps, and teachings of others to supplement my own prayerful study of the scriptures. Since this document was not originally prepared for publication in print, please excuse and recognize that it was unfeasible to properly identify and credit all of the various original sources used to develop the content herein. Ultimately, it is my sincere and foremost objective to accurately present the gospel of God’s grace found in the only infallible source, God’s word itself – the Bible.