

Nothing to Fear but Fear Itself

Books of Ezra and Nehemiah

By Ty Blackburn

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Nehemiah 6
Preached on: Sunday, March 28, 2021

Providence Church
2146 Buford Hwy
Buford Hwy, Duluth, GA 30097

Website: www.providenceduluth.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch

I do want to mention you should have received if you're on our mailing list and if you're not, you can certainly just contact admin@providenceduluth.org and we'd be happy to put you on it. We've asked for a time of prayer and fasting this week or certainly a time of prayer between Wednesday and Friday, this is Holy Week, that is, the week between Palm Sunday and Easter, Good Friday, the day where we remember specifically the day that our Savior was crucified and then Easter Sunday or Resurrection Sunday next Sunday. The elders have been burdened that we really believe the Lord wants us to get back to normal as soon as is possible and prudent, and so we're asking for the church to pray, and so to set aside special time for prayer between Wednesday and Friday. That's the purpose of the time, to pray and ask for God's clear direction and wisdom as it relates to reopening various aspects of the ministry, and that he would motivate the hearts of people to be able to be a part of that because to have ministries, you have to have workers and so folks have to be motivated and ready to do that. So pray that he'll help all of us to do what he wants us to do in the time he wants us to do it and, of course, we encourage you as you're able to, to maybe make part of that time a part of intensify our prayers with fasting. You can fast a number of different ways. Daniel fasts tasty food in Daniel 10, just drink water and things that weren't delightful to him at all. Chapter 9 of Daniel, he fasted food and so we encourage you to do whatever the Lord leads you to do, again, be wise about your own physical health and all of that but the point is to pray. That's the point and the fasting simply is an attempt to focus our hearts, it gives you more time when you're not eating. It's amazing how much time that saves, especially if you're the one doing the cooking or you've got to go buy, you know, it takes the grocery shopping away, it takes the cooking away, more time to pray. And one of the good things about being hungry is it makes you think about food which is a reminder to pray. So this is one of the beauties of fasting. So follow the Lord and join us in prayer. There will be prayer guides coming out this week. Like I said, if you're on our prayer list, you'll be receiving some things to pray about and more specific instructions.

The title of the message this morning is "Nothing to Fear but Fear Itself." Nothing to fear but fear itself. You probably recognize that language, I borrow it from President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Interestingly enough, he spoke those words not during the war but he actually spoke those words at his inauguration in 1933 because the country had experienced a complete economic collapse that began the Great Depression in October of

1929. Roosevelt takes, he's elected in 1932, takes office early 1933. Americans are afraid of the future, afraid that things are going to go from bad to worse, and indeed that depression was something extraordinary that dwarfs any of the economic downturns we've experienced in our lives. It was also a country, interestingly enough, that was only a little more than a decade out of the great Spanish flu pandemic of 1918-1920. You just think 12 years ago, we have pretty good memories of things like that, and so the country had been through that pandemic and that pandemic was much more deadly than our present pandemic, in fact, the numbers are, the low numbers 50 million people died in that flu pandemic, some think as many as 100 million. Based on the world's population today versus then, the numbers of dead if this pandemic were the same as that pandemic relative to the increased world population, we would see 190 million people die. That's how severe the Spanish flu was, and not to minimize what we're dealing with now but it just puts it in perspective and these are things that people have always dealt with and so to understand these things is helpful.

Now so think about the American people are coming into, they're 2 ½ years into the Great Depression, just barely 12 years removed from the Spanish flu, and their President reading the mood of the day, the need of the day, says we have nothing to fear but fear itself. Now the interesting thing is we really do have a lot to fear and they had a lot to fear too. One theologian made the statement that to be human is to be afraid, to be a human in the fallen world is to be afraid. We have good reasons to be afraid, and think about that. It's good to face truth. Our lives, our physical lives are frighteningly fragile. Our minds are frail. It's amazing what a little bit of just, you know, a little imbalance chemically or something and we could be struggling mentally, emotionally we're fragile, we're frail. Our economy, our jobs, everything. If you really look at it there's reason to be afraid. That's not the point of the message, by the way. This isn't it because we have hope in the midst of these circumstances. And what Roosevelt was right about is that the only thing worse than the things that you fear is fear itself. He stumbled onto a very biblical concept and for the Christian actually, it's accurate.

We have nothing to fear but fear itself, and this is what is happening in Nehemiah's day. We've looked at the sixth chapter for a number of weeks and today we come to our last message on it and couldn't leave the text without noting the presence of this reality of fear. This is what Nehemiah's enemies, the enemies of God are seeking to produce. They're seeking to induce fear that will destroy the work of God and so it's the same today. Satan, we're not ignorant of his devices, Paul says in 2 Corinthians 2. We're not ignorant of his schemes, another way of translating that word. He has schemes, he has devices, he has a playbook and his playbook since the beginning has been to inspire fear and to use fear to create havoc in the lives of God's people and ultimately to destroy the work of God.

So this morning, we want to look at this subject of fear and how to respond to it biblically through the example of Nehemiah. So we're going to read the sixth chapter of Nehemiah and four times you're going to see, as I read in the New American Standard, you're going to hear the word "frighten." If you're reading another Bible, along the way you'll see words like "be afraid" or "fear," but essentially it's four times the same Hebrew word is

used and the various translations translate it differently but the idea is fear. They're trying to produce fear. So anyway, chapter 6, verse 1,

1 Now when it was reported to Sanballat, Tobiah, to Geshem the Arab and to the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall, and that no breach remained in it, although at that time I had not set up the doors in the gates, 2 then Sanballat and Geshem sent a message to me, saying, "Come, let us meet together at Chephirim in the plain of Ono." But they were planning to harm me. 3 So I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?" 4 They sent messages to me four times in this manner, and I answered them in the same way. 5 Then Sanballat sent his servant to me in the same manner a fifth time with an open letter in his hand. 6 In it was written, "It is reported among the nations, and Gashmu says, that you and the Jews are planning to rebel; therefore you are rebuilding the wall. And you are to be their king, according to these reports. 7 You have also appointed prophets to proclaim in Jerusalem concerning you, 'A king is in Judah!' And now it will be reported to the king according to these reports. So come now, let us take counsel together." 8 Then I sent a message to him saying, "Such things as you are saying have not been done, but you are inventing them in your own mind." 9 For all of them were trying to frighten us, thinking, "They will become discouraged with the work and it will not be done." But now, O God, strengthen my hands. 10 When I entered the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel, who was confined at home, he said, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you, and they are coming to kill you at night." 11 But I said, "Should a man like me flee? And could one such as I go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in." 12 Then I perceived that surely God had not sent him, but he uttered his prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. 13 He was hired for this reason, that I might become frightened and act accordingly and sin, so that they might have an evil report in order that they could reproach me. 14 Remember, O my God, Tobiah and Sanballat according to these works of theirs, and also Noadiah the prophetess and the rest of the prophets who were trying to frighten me. 15 So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of the month Elul, in fifty-two days. 16 When all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations surrounding us saw it, they lost their confidence; for they recognized that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God. 17 Also in those days many letters went from the nobles of Judah to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them. 18 For many in Judah were bound by oath to him because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah the son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah. 19 Moreover, they were speaking about his good deeds in my presence and reported my words to him. Then Tobiah sent letters to frighten me.

Let's pray together.

Father, we ask that You might by Your Spirit work in our hearts that which is pleasing to You. We know that in Your word is life and that Your Spirit uses this word as a sword. So Lord, search our hearts, discern the thoughts and intentions that are not godly and that are keeping us captive. Set us free and let us worship You more fully and more truly. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

So nothing to fear but fear itself. Though being human is to be afraid, God in his word again and again tells us not to be afraid, not to fear. As we look at this, this morning, what I want to do is organize our thoughts around two points and the first point is to observe a clever strategy. A clever strategy. What we see here is the enemy of our souls operates strategically. He has a master plan and he operates that plan with great skill. He coordinates many different resources to produce the effect that he's trying to produce. And so as we look at this clever strategy, I want to talk as you think about the way strategy, the word strategy is used, it speaks of an overall plan and then smaller parts of that overall plan are sometimes called tactics. So the first subpoint here under a clever strategy is note the varied tactics. The varied tactics. This is 1A. And we saw and we've seen in previous weeks but we need to be reminded of four times we heard the word "frighten," some translations say, "make afraid, fear, intimidate."

The tactic was to inspire fear and he uses various means to do that. The message is from Sanballat and Geshem in verses 2 to 4, four times they send a message saying, "Hey, we want to meet with you. We want to meet with you. We want to meet with you. We want to meet with you." And he knows that they're just wanting to kill him, that it's all about a plot to kill him. But they send four different messages and he's inundated with these messages, interrupted, distracted. And then we saw that the open letter, it culminates in the fifth message, an open letter in verses 5 to 7, it's from Sanballat again where it is basically this false report that they've heard that Nehemiah wants to be king of Israel, that he's going to proclaim himself king, and so this slanderous accusation is brought. Again, Nehemiah recognizes the goal is to make them afraid, to produce fear. That's what he says in verse 9, "For all of them were trying to frighten us."

Then you have another tactic in verse 10 to 13, that is, a false prophet is employed, Shemaiah the son of Delaiah. Apparently, a man of standing in Israel invites Nehemiah to his home. He apparently sends word saying, "I can't leave my home. You need to come here." Some commentators note that this may have actually been part of his prophetic message. "In the same way I am confined to my house, you ought to be confined to the temple." Prophets often would use a word picture, God would call them to do something visible that would then reinforce the message, and some theologians think that that's what was happening here with Shemaiah. "I am unable to leave my home just as you should be unable to leave the safety of the temple." And again Nehemiah recognizes, verse 13, "He was hired for this reason that I might become frightened and act accordingly and sin." Then he mentions that there are other prophets in verse 14, "Noadiah the prophetess and the rest of the prophets" were trying to frighten him. So he's not only dealing with letters

from his enemies, he's dealing with messages from his friends. He's dealing like it's messages within the church, so to speak. People are saying, "Listen, the Lord has spoken to me and this is what He said. You need to stop. You need to hide."

Then after we have that word, amazing word that the wall was completed, that still doesn't stop their letters from Tobiah the Ammonite, words from Tobiah's relatives and people under his influence trying to continually intimidate and frighten Nehemiah. As we read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, we see that this is one of the favored strategies of Satan, provoke fear and through it destroy the work of God. This is the imperative that you find more than any other imperative and it's not even close, the command that is repeated again and again beginning in Genesis all the way to Revelation is, "Do not fear." Sometimes translated, "Do not be afraid," depending on your translation. "Fear not." Some scholars think there is as many as 300 different times, even I've heard 365. I don't think there's 365 imperatives like that but there are lots of references to the danger of fear and you add them all up, I found over 100 clear statements in the Bible where it says, "Do not fear. Do not be afraid."

We run into fear right after sin enters the world in the garden of Eden. Sin enters the world and the first thing that happens is man's afraid. You see, it really is a part of the human condition to be afraid. Where do we hear that? Remember what Adam says to the Lord when God speaks to him? He says, "I was afraid so I hid from You." Right after sin comes fear.

Genesis 15:1, the Lord appears to Abram and he says, "Do not fear. I am your shield and your very great reward." Genesis 21:17, the Lord says to Hagar, "Do not fear. I will take care of you and your son, Ishmael." Chapter 26, verse 24, he tells Isaac after Isaac has experienced a lot of conflict with surrounding peoples over wells and these different disputes, the Lord appears to him and says, "Do not fear for I am with you."

All the way through the Bible. I mean, just turn to Isaiah for a moment. There's some wonderful verses in Isaiah and you need to know where these are because these are great passages to memorize and meditate if you haven't seen them, or you haven't seen them in a long time. Turn to Isaiah 41 and you'll find this exhortation in every, almost on every page of Scripture, as it were. Not quite that but almost. But in some places you find it just really powerful ways. Isaiah 41:10, "Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand." Comforting words. Look at verse 13, "For I am the LORD your God, who upholds your right hand, Who says to you, 'Do not fear, I will help you.'" Verse 14, "'Do not fear, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel; I will help you,' declares the LORD." He knows our weakness. Here he speaks to his own people as a worm. He knows that we are worms and therefore he is there to help us.

Turn over to chapter 43:1, "But now, thus says the LORD, your Creator, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel, 'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine! When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be

scorched, Nor will the flame burn you. For I am the LORD your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior." Verse 5, "Do not fear, for I am with you." In chapter 44, verse 1, "But now listen, O Jacob, My servant, And Israel, whom I have chosen: Thus says the LORD who made you And formed you from the womb, who will help you, 'Do not fear, O Jacob My servant.'"

We go to the New Testament. An angel shows up when Zachariah's in the temple and what is the first thing he says? "Do not fear." An angel comes to Mary and he says, "Do not fear." The angel shows up to the shepherds and he says, "Do not fear. I bring you good news of great joy." Jesus when he encounters the disciples, you remember when he has the encounter with the disciples when they've been fishing and there's been no success and he tells Peter, "Lower your nets again." Peter says, "Lord, we've been fishing all night we'll do what You say." They lower their nets again, they bring in a great haul of fish. Peter knows that this is something that God has done and he says, "Depart from me, I'm a sinful man." The text goes on to say Jesus said to him, "Do not fear." When the glory of God is revealed, those are the times where we're most apt to be afraid and our gentle, loving Savior says, "Do not fear." Matthew 17:7, after they see him on the Mount of Transfiguration, they see his glory, his face shining with the brilliance of the Shekinah glory emanating out from the man Christ Jesus and they fall on their faces, they're afraid for their lives and Jesus after they hear the voice out of heaven, they're trembling, unable to even lift their eyes, Jesus comes to them and says, "Do not be afraid." And then the last command of "do not be afraid," Revelation 1:17. The Apostle John sees the glory of the resurrected and ascended Christ in all of his glory, falls as a dead man and Jesus touches him and says, "Do not be afraid."

And we're not to be afraid because God is with us, but it is a clear strategy of the enemy to produce fear. That's why God has to continually say, "Do not be afraid." And that is the tactic that he uses. He inundates us with temptations to fear. There are so many things that you can be afraid of. If you want to, you can find all kinds of things to be afraid of 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. And now with the internet, you can find things that you never even knew that you could imagine that you can be afraid of, and all of them have a certain reasonableness about it because we, after all, are frail. Our life is frighteningly fragile but we need to understand that our enemy's design, his tactics, even though we may have room that we have to take careful precautions, we are to act with prudence, we're to take steps to protect, you know, ourselves from imminent danger certainly. We're not to be foolhardy. A wise man sees danger coming and hides himself. There is a place for prudence but there is not a place for fear. I mean, in a sense, we're afraid but it's what you do with it. You don't let fear control you. In your fear, how do you respond? That's what this is about.

Satan's strategy is to produce fear and there's these varied tactics we see with Nehemiah. He tried all these different strategies but it was all aimed at one strategic aim. All the various means he employed were aimed at one clear objective. It wasn't just to inspire fear, it was to stop the work, to destroy the work. That was the goal. We see this, Nehemiah identifies it when he first says in verse 9, the first time he mentions fear, "For all of them were trying to frighten us, they will become discouraged thinking, they will

become discouraged with the work and it will not be done." That is the enemy's objective, that the work stop. Satan hates the work of God and he wants to destroy it. In fact, it's interesting to note that fear does that, fear can immobilize you. Fear can be something that paralyzes us, isn't it? I mean, isn't it amazing how fear can just weaken, you can feel it in your body, and that's why Nehemiah prays, "Strengthen my hands." The opposite of fear actually is strength and courage.

But he doesn't just want us to stop the work, he wants to destroy the work. We see this when we really look carefully at the objectives of the enemies of God in Nehemiah 6. In verse 9 he mentions "become discouraged with the work and it will not be done." I mentioned last time, "become discouraged" in the New American Standard which I'm reading, translates a Hebrew verb which really pictures the hands dropping. "They're trying to frighten us thinking they will drop their hands and the work will not be done."

So they want the work to stop but then also they want to destroy the work. Verse 13, I think, gets at this when we are again reminded of now the motive behind the false prophet Shemaiah and his counsel to Nehemiah to hide in the temple. Verse 13, "He was hired for this reason, that I might become frightened," and here he doesn't say stop the work, here he says, "act accordingly and sin, so that they might have an evil report in order that they could reproach me." Here he pictures kind of the process that fear can take on, that fear as a seed comes into your heart and then it can go all the way to not just from the seed but all the way to the plant and to the fruit. And the process he describes is you become afraid and then you act out of that, and when you act out of fear, you sin, and when you sin, if Nehemiah had sinned, he would have developed a bad name in order that they could reproach him. The idea is they wanted to make Nehemiah afraid so he would act accordingly, sin, his name would become damaged, and then they could, then heap insults upon the work and so discourage it as if to take it backwards. This is what's interesting about fear, fear not only paralyzes and immobilizes and you could say, in that sense, fear stops the progress, but fear also starts the regress, that as soon as you give in to stopping the progress, it continues on to regress. You move backwards. You don't stay where you are. Fear moves you backwards. How? Because Satan works in the heart and he works through the act of sin to bring it about.

He says "reproach." This word is a loaded word in Nehemiah. It was first used in Nehemiah 1:3 when Nehemiah received word about Jerusalem. The remnant, this is Nehemiah 1:3, he asked his brothers, his brother and the men that had come from Judah, "What's happening with the people in Jerusalem?" They said to me, "The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach." Objects of scorn. Objects of ridicule. Think about it, our job is to glorify God and when we're glorifying God, the work is advancing, it is progressing. So what fear does is fear gets you to stop glorifying God so there's no longer any progress, but not only does it do that, it gets you to start harming the name of God. It brings reproach because that's what Nehemiah is talking about. In fact, that same word "reproach" was used in chapter 2, verse 17 when Nehemiah's speaking to the people and he says, "You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate, its gates burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we'll no longer be a reproach." We're an object of scorn. The

people of God are an object of scorn so God's name is being defamed and so what Nehemiah is saying in Nehemiah 6 is, "Listen, had I given in to fear, it wouldn't have just stopped the progress, it would have been a backwards movement to the work of God." Fear has the power to destroy the work.

So fear when it reaches its end, its desired end, you see, Satan is a strategic genius. He knows how weak we are. He knows how prone we are to fear because he's sowed in our hearts the original lie, which was to doubt God's goodness, and doubting God's goodness is what makes us afraid. If we really believed God was good, we would never be afraid. If we believe he's sovereign and we believe he's good, we have nothing to fear. But he knows, he's sown into our hearts in sin that the very essence of sin, the belief that God is not good, he's not for you, he's holding out on you. That's what he told Eve. "You can't trust God." So he knows that we don't trust, we have this built into our sinful DNA in the old man, this readiness to doubt God, and so he sows seeds and reminds us of things and reasons for which we ought to be afraid, things that are too great for us, and he wants us then to lose track of God and our purpose and stop doing the work. And the moment you take your eye off the work, you have begun to lose.

The moment, it's interesting he says in chapter 6 when he says, "be frightened and act accordingly and sin," there are several words in the Old Testament used for "sin" but this is the word "miss the mark," and to miss the mark is to, first of all, stop looking at the mark. So fear causes us to stop looking at the mark, God and his glory, his name, his kingdom, and we take our eyes off of that and that's the beginning of sin and the essence of sin, and when that happens Satan is able to produce in our hearts that which actually begins to destroy the work. In a world like ours today especially because of the way you can be inundated with, I mean, we can receive, you can receive message after message after message after message after message that says, "Be afraid. Be afraid. Be afraid. Be afraid. Be afraid." And if you're watching your phone and you're uncritically looking at social media, that is what you're receiving on a daily basis.

Now listen, part of the reason, the biggest reason is Satan, and listen, if you don't think you should be a critical recipient of every information that you receive, you are being foolish. You don't trust any media source because they're human beings and they may not have a design behind it but Satan does and he's their god. He is the god of this age. He wants to destroy you and me. And so you have to think critically. You know they're going to sensationalize things to make me more afraid. In fact, when you add the profit motive in, that's what's destroyed the news media. The news media used to be, even though they were always decidedly in one direction politically, they were at least in the old days not driven by profit motivation. It was a part of the standing rule in ethics of media that the editorial page was for opinion and the news pages were for news, and they were to be given uncritically, you know, just the facts. But over time what they realized is and as they got pressure from the networks and the networks used to say, "You guys don't worry about profit. We'll take care of profit with all of our tv shows and our ballgames. You guys do the job." But over time that changed and now it got to be about profit in all the news media, and how do you get profit out of the news media? You create interest. You create a desire for people to want to consume more and more and more news. And

how do you do that? It's not by telling the good stories, the happy stories. You tell people they need to be afraid. You tell people that the world, the sky is falling and people have a way of wanting to tune in and hear more about that.

Well, so the enemy wants to create more and more fear and we can be told day after day, moment after moment, reasons to be afraid, inundated literally with calls to fear, and if we're not guarding our hearts, we are easy prey. And the stakes are high because, first of all, when we are letting the things that are happening in our world distract us from the glory of God and the work of God, we are a completely, at best, beginning to be an unprofitable servant. We're not doing anything of value for the kingdom. But it quickly doesn't stay there long, you don't stay in neutral long, you're either going forward or you're going backward. It immediately begins to be that we're not only not profiting the kingdom, we're tearing it down.

And think about the ways that we're tempted to do this in our day. I mean, whether it's the coronavirus or it's the race relations or it's, you know, the economic future of America, politics, whatever it is, we are tempted to be afraid and we are tempted in our fear. What happens when you're afraid? Who do you think about when you're afraid? Yourself. You think about myself, my family, that's all I'm concerned about. You stop loving. You stop seeing needs. You stop moving in love toward people and what happens is as you become more self-focused, then in your own self-talk you begin to harbor even more accusing feelings about your brothers and sisters. You start thinking they don't really love me, or they wouldn't have said this, or they would have ignored that, or why haven't they called me? Rather than asking the question why haven't I called them? When you find yourself asking the question why haven't they called me, pick up the phone and call them not to tell them why haven't you called me? I needed to clarify that. But to say, "Hey, I'm concerned about you. How are you doing? We haven't talked in a while. I just wanted to catch up with you. Are you okay?"

And Satan loves to sow discord among the people of God because he knows there's nothing more powerful in the world than the people of God who know Jesus Christ and love Jesus Christ and are brought together, the dividing wall of hostility has been broken down and we love one another, we serve one another, we walk through life together through thick and thin, whatever happens. The world may be falling around us but the people of God walking together, there's nothing that can withstand that. Satan's kingdom trembles when God's people love one another and they love one another in truth. That's the only kind of love there is. If you don't really love truth, you don't really love one another, you're just pretending. The gospel is the only way people really love one another, the true gospel. So they may name the name of Jesus but if they don't put everything on what we talked about earlier, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, then they are not our friends, they are the mission field even though they claim to be believers, even though they claim to speak with authority and tell us what Jesus wants us to do. If they deny the gospel, we need to separate from them as far as letting them influence us.

So the strategy of the enemy is the same today as it's always been and it is a clever strategy but, praise the Lord, second point this morning is an effective defense. An effective defense. Nehemiah does not succumb to this clever strategy. He withstands the repeated assaults. He does not bow to fear. He does not stop the work. It's almost like, it's not even a speed bump for Nehemiah. I mean, he's just going right on down the road. I think there's three things we can see in the passage that he does that help us and we'll try to expand on them a little bit but three things we see Nehemiah does.

The first thing in how we need to mount an effective defense against our enemy's clever strategy to sow fear and to stop the work, and Nehemiah's effective defense, three things, three subpoints under the second point, effective defense. A. We need to recognize the enemy's work. We just need to recognize it. It's really instructive that Nehemiah stops and pauses at each step of the way to say, "This is what they were doing." He doesn't wait until the end. He tells you right off the bat. The first tactic the enemy used was those letters, remember? And he sums up that discussion in verse 9 by saying, "For all of them were trying to frighten us, thinking they'll stop the work." He identifies the enemy. He recognizes the strategy. In verse 14, "the rest of the prophets who were trying to frighten me." Verse 13, "that I might become frightened."

So the second and third tactic is the same thing, they're about frightening and then finally the continued use of letters by Tobiah and even sowing discord by talking to the people in Jerusalem themselves, and those people speaking well of Tobiah, this enemy of God to Nehemiah. He says, "It was all about frightening."

So recognize the enemy for what it is. Distinguish. Think critically about what's coming into your heart and your soul. This takes effort. I think one of the things that is really disturbing to me, I mean, we've been talking about this as elders and some of the men in men's Bible study have been talking about this as well, is the loss of the ability to think critically in our day. I mean, we're raising a generation of people, somebody wrote a book about 8-9 years ago, it was about Millennials, just be warned if you're a Millennial, you're not going to like this. The book was entitled "The Dumbest Generation," and there's some truth to that in this and I think the next generation, what is it, Generation Z or whatever? Is that what the next one is, Generation Y? Y is Millennials, I think, isn't it? Who cares what the letter is? Okay, you think you're smart and we can think we're smart because we can Google something and we know how to work our technology to tell us to spit something out, but the reality is wisdom is much deeper, much different than that. And just intelligence, real intelligence, not the ability of a brain to process information but, I mean, to actually process it in reasoning through an issue. We are being conditioned not to think. You are being conditioned to hear something and react emotionally, hear something and react emotionally, hear something and react emotionally. And you know that because you only get this much information about whatever you're told anyway, and you're told how you should feel about it. That's not the way a Christian is to live. A Christian can process information and they put it in context of who God is and what we know to be true, and then we can then respond in a godly way, and if you're not going to learn to do that, you're going to be like the world. You're going to be, as Paul says in

Ephesians 4, you're going to be immature and babes tossed here and fro by every wind and wave of doctrine.

So you must resist the current to just react to everything you hear. One of the best things you can do is stop immediately tweeting something when you see something. Stop commenting immediately. Think about it. That would save a whole lot of pain in this world if other people just did that. We need to be that way. It doesn't mean you don't speak. There's a place to speak but speak in careful measured ways, and sometimes you need to speak immediately. I'm not saying you never need to speak immediately but don't speak emotionally in the moment. You go to the Lord, pray in that moment and ask for clarity and love and speak the truth in love.

So we need to recognize his devices. Secondly, the second thing Nehemiah does is he prays. How does he overcome fear? He doesn't just recognize the enemy, he prays. His instinct is to pray. Twice in this chapter he records prayers for us. It doesn't mean he didn't pray other times, he just tells us twice he prayed. This is one of the things that stands out about Nehemiah among all the books in the Bible. He is the only guy we have in Scripture that tells you continually about little kind of flare prayers that he sent up to God. Other books will tell you about an extended prayer. Daniel recorded his prayer of repentance but Nehemiah tells you in chapter 2, he prayed when he was before the king and the king said, "What should I do? What do you want me to do?" "I prayed to the God of heaven and then I said." And here you have in verse 9, after he tells "they were trying to frighten me, trying to frighten us, thinking they will become discouraged with the work and it will not be done, but now, O God, strengthen my hands." He prays. In verse 14, that verse 14 is a prayer. After he thinks about what Tobiah and the false prophets have done, he says, "Remember, O my God, Tobiah and Sanballat according to these works." He entrusts them to the vengeance of God, not to himself. He prays.

So when fear tempts you to inaction, when fear seeks to immobilize you or paralyze you, what do you do? Pray. Recognize that it's the enemy and then pray. This is what Philippians 4 is basically teaching us. Remember fear and anxiety are basically brother and sister. Paul says in Philippians 4:6, "Be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." Four words to speak a prayer: prayer, supplication, thanksgiving, let your request be made known. So when you're tempted to be fearful, pray. He goes on to say, "and then the peace of God which surpasses all comprehension will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Do you want the peace of God to guard your hearts? Don't you want that when you're afraid? Well, you've got to pray.

So Nehemiah prayed. But it's interesting looking back at Nehemiah in chapter 6, verse 9, what does he pray? How does he pray? This is really instructive. Think about this. I think he doesn't pray the way you and I are tempted to pray. When we're afraid, what are we tempted to pray? I say tempted, what do we tend to pray? "Lord, help me. Lord, make my circumstances better. Lord, cause all of this to go away. Lord, give me comfort. Lord, make my life easy." Isn't that really a lot of what we pray because we're not really praying in the Spirit according to the will of God? Nehemiah doesn't pray for relief, he

doesn't pray for God to change his circumstances, he doesn't pray for ease and comfort, he doesn't even pray not to be afraid. Not by that. He prays, "Lord, make me strong." And in praying "strengthen my hands," what's he really doing? He is setting his heart on God's agenda. It's not about what I'm afraid what might happen to me, "Lord, what's at stake here is Your work." He prays in a God-centered way, not a self-centered way.

He prays with God foremost in his mind. "What is Your purpose here? What is Your plan? What is Your will?" This is why Jesus, in fact, I think one of the things that I would encourage you to do this week and maybe during the time of prayer and fasting especially but just make this a part of your regular, not necessarily daily but regular from time to time pray through the Lord's prayer. Jesus when the disciples wanted, they said, "Lord, teach us to pray," and he said this, "Pray in this way," and he gives a guide for prayer. It's not that we're supposed to pray these words mechanically. No, he's telling us, "This is how you pray. Pray in this way." There are seven petitions in the Lord's Prayer, seven things that we're to ask for in the Lord's Prayer and the first three are all about God and his glory.

So he says, "When you pray, if you want to pray effectively, if you want to pray like I do," that's what the disciples are asking, "Lord, teach us to pray." "If you want to pray like I do, then you've got to, first of all, get your heart focused where it needs to be on the kingdom of God." What are the first three petitions? "Our Father, which art in heaven," we address God in the first petition. "Hallowed be Your name. May Your name be revered. May Your name be honored." Now think about this, I'm afraid, I'm terrified, I'm scared, Lord, help me not be scared. No, "Lord, hallowed be Your name. May Your name be great."

The second petition, "Your kingdom come." Not my kingdom. Not my agenda. Not what I want to have happen. Not my plans. Not my purposes but your purposes and your kingdom. May they come to pass. "Your kingdom come."

Third petition, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." I want it down on earth to be just like it is in heaven. When you speak the word, the angel takes off and he does it just like that. "Lord, would Your will be done on this earth that way? That's what I want." You see if we do that our hearts are completely aligned with God.

Then you move to your, "Lord, give us this day our daily bread." We need food. We need provision. In a world like ours, how easy it is to lose a job and today how easy it is to lose a job for saying the wrong thing in this crazy cancel culture. You can be afraid of that. You may be afraid of that right now. It's appropriate to pray, "Lord, give us this day our daily bread. Keep my job, Lord. I need to keep my job for my family." It's appropriate to pray that but it comes after putting it in perspective of God's kingdom first.

We go on and we ask for forgiveness of our sins, that the Lord would deliver us from evil, keep us out of temptation, deliver us from evil. But we start with the kingdom of God. That's how to pray.

So when we pray, we need to pray this way and it reorients the mind, it reorients the heart and it puts us back in the presence of God. We're now on his agenda and everything looks different when you're in the presence of God. And think about that. No matter what you're afraid of, if you really know you are in the presence of God at that moment, in a sense, what does it matter? A giant isn't that big a deal if God is right with me.

This is what the Old Testament saints understood. I mean, think about David. "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil." Why? "For You are with me." Psalm 27, "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the defense of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?" If the Lord is the defense of my life, what in the world do I have to be afraid of? Like I said, there's good reasons to be afraid, all the things you can think about, but if God is the defense of your life, then suddenly no matter how good that reason is, it comes to zero. It means nothing because nothing can happen to you apart from the God who is with you willing it and you know if you're in Christ, that he only wills to bless you, now blessing you according to what really is blessing, not what you and I mistakenly think is blessing. We think blessing is everything going smooth, everything happening the way we want it to, everybody being happy with us. That's what we think and we are fools. Just remember that. We are. God knows what blessing is and when we come to understand that, we're like a little child that we want a certain thing but our parent knows that they're taking us to even a better, you know, like they're taking us to, I don't even want to say a destination, they're taking us to some great place and we're like, "I want to stay here." We're crying, we want this, we want this, we want this, and they're like they know so much better. And now multiply that by 20 trillion and that's the difference between knowing what you and I want and what God has planned for us. And if you believe that, you will not fear. You don't need to fear. Fear is insane. It's irrational. It's completely a waste of time and energy.

So recognize, pray, and then thirdly, work. Nehemiah recognized the enemy, he prayed and then he got back to work. This is how you deal with temptations to fear. When you're afraid, recognize the enemy. When you're afraid, pray. When you're afraid, get back to work. Build. "Lord, I'm wanting Your kingdom to happen, I want Your name to be made great. Show me the needs around me and let me build. Let me minister. Let me encourage. Let me speak truth. Let me bless other brothers and sisters. I'm feeling like this other sister or brother that I said earlier is upset with me and I'm wondering why they haven't called, Lord, let me call. Let me call with a heart of joy, not an accusatory spirit, and let me bless them, and let me serve them, and let me encourage them in Christ. Let me talk about the gospel with them." And you do that and you are building the kingdom of God.

And fear, I don't have time to do this today, I'm going to summarize it and I'm going to just kind of give you a picture. But I think 1 John 4:18 is an interesting verse that speaks to this. It says, "perfect love casts out fear." Now let me explain this. In context, it's talking about a particular kind of fear and that is the fear of being judged by God and not being saved. It's talking about assurance of salvation and it's saying that when your love is perfected, you will not fear and it will cast out that fear. But I really believe it also applies to any kind of fear because at root it's the same thing, and that when your love is

perfected, it will cast out fear. And you know, when you look at this and I encourage you to read it, read 1 John 4:7-19, and when you see that, what you're going to see is you're going to see commands. "Beloved, let us love one another. Let us love one another." When we love God, and it says in verse 12, it tells you what perfect love is. When we love one another, God's love is perfected in us and he abides in us. What it's saying is this, you can only love others when you know how much God loves you and now listen, that's not the end, love is perfect when you then love God back by loving others. When you go and you lay down your life for other people, that's when love is perfected and that's what banishes fear from your life. Now you have to know, "Jesus, You've told me You love me. I don't feel like You love me but I'm going to go serve this person because I know You love me and Your word tells me that You love me. Even though I feel terrible, I'm afraid, I'm trembling, I'm going to go and I'm going to love them because I know You love me because Your word says You love me. Even though I don't feel it, I'm going to go serve them." And as you do that and you're asking him to help you, what you will find is God will cast out fear in your life. It won't be forever. You're going to have to keep learning to do that, and if you make loving others your objective and the way that you respond to fear, what happens is you become more than a conqueror through him who loves you. Satan comes with all of his strategy, all of his tactics and you by the power of Christ and the greatness of our Savior, you trample on his head.

That's what God wants for us. He doesn't want us to be controlled by fear, he wants us to be free, but not free to do what we want to do, free to love him by loving our brothers and sisters and loving the lost, having a deeper heart for unbelievers. So when you're afraid, what we need to do, you need to recognize the enemy's here, he's trying to take me down. You need to pray, go to the Lord. Be God-centered in your prayer and then you need to go to work, that is, serve others in love. That's God's will for his people and that is an effective defense and that will lead to fruitfulness just like it did for Nehemiah, 52 days they finished the wall and everyone saw the glory of God at that moment in history, in the most brilliant way that God would make it known at that point in time and God can do the same in your life tomorrow.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, we thank You for such a great Savior. Jesus Christ is everything that we need. Lord, His death has purchased our full salvation, His blood has paid the ransom price, He bore our sins in His own body on the cross, He received the wrath of God in full for the sins of everyone who would ever believe, every sin we would ever commit, He received the wrath to its full degree and therefore when He said, "It is finished," it is paid in full, it was finished. And therefore we now who believe in Him, who trust in Him, who believe that He rose again from the dead on the third day, that He reigns in heaven now at the right hand of the majesty on high, we who believe in this glorious Savior, we now are accepted and loved and treasured by You because of Him, not because of us but because of Him and we have nothing to fear. Lord, increase our faith. Give us greater faith to trust Your word and no matter what we encounter to know that these promises are yes and amen in Christ Jesus, and may our lives resound with that amen, yes, it is true, so be it. Every promise is true. You will not leave me nor forsake me. If God is for

you, who can be against you? If God did not spare His Son but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not together with Him freely give us all things? Lord, let us walk in the joy and the victory that Your truth and Your gospel and Your cross and resurrection have bought for us. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.