

Lessons from Nehemiah

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[0:00] Well, let's open our Bibles to Ephesians chapter 4. Amazing that we should have words from the living God for us.

A book that is as much authored and sent to us by God as if it came down on a rope from heaven. This is the word of God to us.

And so we read in Ephesians chapter 4, the first 16 verses. As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

Be completely humble and gentle. Be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

[1:14] But to each one of us, grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says, What does he ascended mean?

Except that he also descended to the lower earthly regions. He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens in order to fill the whole universe.

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers.

To prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up. Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.

[2:32] Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is Christ. From him, the whole body joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work.

Well, the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever. Nathaniel, come and preach to us God's word. Our scripture reading should help us with the text that I've chosen for this morning.

It's an Old Testament text. If you have your Bibles, you could turn to the book of Nehemiah. I'd like us to look at two chapters of Nehemiah this morning. Nehemiah 3 through 4, and my theme here is standing steadfast.

Nehemiah 3 through 4, standing steadfast. Children, you know the writings of C.S. Lewis. He wrote a book, Voyage of the Dawn Treader. What is the name of that mouse? I picked this up from a wonderful little commentary by James Hamilton.

What is the name of that chief mouse? Chief mouse loves Aslan. He loves the Prince Caspian, and his name is Reepie Chief. He is the chief mouse, isn't he?

[3:55] One day in battle, he almost died, and he didn't know it, but he lost his tail. When he awakes, when Lucy helps him and he awakes, he bows down to Aslan, and he sees his tail is missing.

And if you're a mouse, your tail is your honor, right? And he begins to complain to Aslan about his missing tail, to which Aslan says, maybe you think too highly of yourself, and Aslan can see what the chief mouse cannot see, and what is behind the chief mouse?

It's the second mouse. And what do we hear from that beautiful statement about, That's a beautiful story of unity, and that tells us that this chief mouse, right, he was sulking a little bit, and then he recognized how unified his men were in their service to Aslan.

Nehemiah is one of these leaders that was able to unify God's people, and so this message is really about unity, and to emphasize especially the importance of unity.

I have ten thoughts. I always begin with ten thoughts to kind of summarize some of the things that we'll be talking about in our text, but this is about how God, his community development. Number one, and it's all about leaders.

[5:21] Leaders must set goals for God's people. We see this in the book of Nehemiah, and we will find some examples of us this morning. Number two, leaders must lead by example.

Three, leaders must motivate people to serve God. We must encourage people to serve God. Four, leaders must delegate ministry to others. We do not want to be micromanagers.

Five, leaders must respond wisely to ridicule, to problems and challenges. Six, leaders must protect God's people. That's one of the job descriptions in the New Testament.

Seven, leaders must be or should be wise in planning and in administration. I think when I met Pastor Bob years ago, I recognized he is an excellent administrator planner, and I think that's probably carried on here after his death.

Eight, leaders must prevent confusion and chaos, and that means we must be clear communicators. Everyone needs to know what's going on in the church. Nine, leaders must look to God in a crisis.

[6:29] Nehemiah has several in his life. We encounter a few in chapters three and four today. Number ten, leaders must stick to the unfinished task. We must stick to the unfinished task today in which Jesus Christ has given to us, and it's easy to get sidelined, isn't it, in the ministry and serving God.

If we could pray briefly, let us keep our eyes fixed on God, and that he would keep us united and steadfast in our task. Father in heaven, we pray again that you would come to bless your word. We need your spirit to help us not only to understand but to apply this to our lives this morning.

Lord, we pray that you would continue to bless Grace Fellowship Church with steadfast unity for years to come. In Christ's name we pray. Amen. Nehemiah, you probably know a little bit about him.

I won't give the details in multitude form, but he is living after the exile, and Jerusalem is a ghetto. Nobody wants to live in Jerusalem at this stage in history.

Ezra has been there for many years, but who wants to leave here? I read Nehemiah 1 and 2, and I see that he is not just a tea taster for the king. He is a high-ranking diplomat in this most powerful superpower of the ancient world, the Persian government.

[7:43] And in chapter 1 of Nehemiah, he took the time. He had a very good job. I'm convinced of that. He took the time to ask about the conditions of his brethren back in Jerusalem, and the report was, we are in big trouble.

People are discouraged. They want to quit. We cannot do what God has called us to do. And he asked that question, and then he has this Isaiah moment. He says, Lord, send me. But he has to get permission from the most powerful monarch in that part of the ancient world at that time.

And so chapter 2 details how God moved that heart of the king from Proverbs, and he sends him to be his governor, to be his eyes and his ears.

And it's so amazing in the book of Nehemiah because before Nehemiah made the request, he knew this was a dangerous request. It was the very same king who shut all construction operations down before Nehemiah said, Can I go back and rebuild these walls?

It had to take faith for him to do that. And he's an example of someone that points us forward in a Christ-like manner when Jesus Christ enters into this world. Nehemiah knew the scriptures.

[8:50] It's evident in his prayer. He prayed and asked God, Can I be a part of rebuilding the walls in the city of Jerusalem? And so God sent him back, and in chapters 3 and 4, we now see the work is going to begin.

And I have two broad points if you're writing anything down and want to follow. Chapter 3 is simply this, Stand Strong in Unity. If you're a Christian and you're part of this church, we always have the mentality, Stand Strong in Unity.

And we will come to chapter 4 in a moment, and that point will be Stand Strong against Disunity. So this is all offense, and chapter 4 is going to be about defense.

And in each of these points, I have two sub-points if you want to follow what I'm doing. As we come to Nehemiah chapter 3, the first four verses, the thought is this, Thank God for godly leaders.

Isn't this practical when you think about what this means to us today in the church? Nehemiah was a godly leader. And many of the people, they came to witness this man who came from a far distance into their city that was broken down.

[9:57] And we see the call of Nehemiah at the end of chapter 2 in verse 17. He says, And so here now we come to the scene where they are going to begin the work.

And you look at this whole chapter, and I'll just read the first verse of Nehemiah 3. Eliashib, the high priest, and his fellow priest went to work and rebuild the sheep gate.

They dedicated it and set its doors in place, building as far as the tower of the hundred, which they dedicated, and as far as the tower of Hananel.

Now you look at the rest of that chapter, I'm not going to read but one verse in the rest of this chapter. It's filled with names that are hard to pronounce. That's why I'm not going to read them. I feel sorry for her.

Your hand would be hurting after the service. Eliashib is the high priest, and he sets a good example at this point in the book. He gets the other priests involved. And they take share in their own responsibility to rebuild the sheep gate, because that was probably the gate where the sacrificial animals came through.

[11:20] So, yeah, it's important to see this mission to completion, because it affects the success of the ministry of the temple. So, yes, I should get out there with my fellow priests, and I should get my hands dirty, and I should be involved, and I should support Nehemiah.

It's a common goal for the common good. And so far, he sets a godly example. He appears to be a wonderful example of someone that is supporting Nehemiah.

When we look at this entire chapter, it's long. It's a major construction project, what is going on here. Something that is interesting when we see the secret of Nehemiah's success, it's sort of easy, it's obvious when we stop and think about it, but number one, he makes a complex job simple.

He didn't make it more complicated. He made it simple. He divides it into kind of equal segments for repair. Second, he had an ability to motivate God's people to work together for this common project.

They worked together harmoniously. And third, he certainly knew it in his own heart, but he demonstrates to God's people that this can only be done by God's power, by his grace in our lives, but we too have to get busy in working.

[12:30] And so from Nehemiah 3, we see how we should proceed in building the city of God today, the church. It's the same basic principle. We too have a common goal, don't we?

A common good for the church. If anybody should have been involved, it should have been Eliashib. As he starts out well, and he gathers the priests, they are willing to use their consecrated hands for manual labor.

To do this work of rebuilding the wall at this time of emergency status in Jerusalem, this is an important, necessary ministry. And yet Eliashib, like so many unwise New Year's resolutions, didn't complete his task.

He turns out to be an unfaithful man. The high priest in Israel, he turns effectively against Nehemiah, doesn't he? He is compromised, as we read later, especially chapter 13.

As we find out more and more what this man is really like, he is double-minded, isn't he? And it's sad to see people like Eliashib, perhaps even in the church, that will not remain true to a calling.

[13:38] They start so well, and I think every church probably has some people like this. They have the appearance of godliness, but there seems to be no power behind it, and after a while, it could be even a leader, it could be a member.

They kind of just fizzle out, and they really don't care about working on the ministry, this project, any longer. And it happens, too. His grandson married the enemy of Nehemiah, the enemy of God's people, Sanballat.

His grandson married the enemy, and so from that point on, we see that that's where his real alliance, his allegiance is. It's not with Nehemiah. And so Eliashib, he looks well like the Pharisees, but he does not lead by example.

And I think all of us know that the whole history of this church, you have been blessed with godly leaders. Not every church has the stability that you have. Some churches go through great problems with leadership, and sometimes they become disappointed in their leaders.

Nehemiah was a faithful man, and God has blessed you through the decades now with faithful men that have served you, and that's something to be thankful for. Thank God for faithful men. Can you imagine if we were living in Jerusalem, and it's not a very nice place to live.

[14:55] Later we learn that it's a place like Hurricane Katrina. Who wants to live in New Orleans after that thing comes through? You know, there are houses broken down. It would be like Aleppo, Syria today.

If we were Syrian, how many of us would want to go back and live in Aleppo, Syria? A broken down city, a dangerous place surrounded by enemies. That's what Jerusalem is like.

And it wouldn't surprise me if some of the enemies of God's people that did business and knew the people on a daily basis, they were trying to, of course, keep them down. Maybe they knew how to quote some of the scriptures that they heard the Hebrews speak or sing to mock them.

Oh, yes, doesn't that verse say beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth? Isn't Jerusalem the center of the great heavenly king? They could have mocked them with the Hebrew scriptures.

If your God is so great, why is your city in such ruins? And today we see these same types of attitudes in the church in terms of the relationship of the world. Many times the world ignores us.

[15:59] They despise us. They overlook us. They just simply dismiss us. We're not that important to them. Throughout this chapter, almost 20 times you see words like next to him or beyond him.

16, 17, 18, 19, 20 and beyond. Nehemiah was close to his people. He was there when the work was being done. He wasn't sitting in the office kind of playing everything.

He was with his people. And we see when Jesus comes, our greater Nehemiah in the Gospels, he spends time with the disciples and Jesus spends time with people. He spends a lot of time with people.

And Nehemiah is an example of what godly leaders look like today, even in the church. Again, he doesn't waste valuable time forcing people to commute across the city or around a dangerous part of the village where they're living.

He says, everybody, just work in front of your own house. He makes something that could have been complex and argumentative so simple. You ever heard the old saying, a camel is a horse designed by a committee?

[17:04] I don't love committees, but I do know that they're important. We do need committees to plan things, and that's important. But that saying is a saying that represents sometimes when we get together with committees and planning, it's more confusing with the solution than when you first began.

And when leaders cannot make something simple for God's people to understand, it really loses an effectiveness, doesn't it? Nehemiah was a good leader. He has this skill, this gift from God, this art of organization, and probably he took some of his learning from the Persian government and brought it to bear upon the blessings for God's people.

And so they make progress. And when we have godly leaders in the church, just as Nehemiah was to the people of God in those days, we can begin to make progress.

We need godly leaders to make progress in the church. Generally, leaders know what type of a gift a Christian has. They kind of have a sense of it if you've talked to them a while.

And sometimes Christians don't know, what is my spiritual gift? Well, if you don't know, go talk to your pastors here, your elders, and I'm sure they can help you. They may know where you should fit in ministry, where you can help out in this church.

[18:17] Nehemiah delegates at least three times. We are told in this chapter he delegates ministry and responsibility. He wants to keep God's people unified.

He is not a micromanager. He doesn't do everything for himself. And surely it would be foolish for church officers not to ease their workload from time to time by delegating certain things to faithful members.

The older a church gets, the more resistance to change that we become. I've seen this over and over. You read about it in church history. And I sometimes have that tendency.

There is this saying, today's leaders were yesterday's novices. We have to let people serve God somewhere. And we have to give them responsibility. And we see this in the life of Nehemiah.

And it's a good model for church leaders today. To always be looking for people that can serve and to help them find their place. Jesus, of course, is the perfect example.

[19:15] He takes 12 disciples. He delegates. He gives them responsibility. And they are called to accomplish this great commission. He finished his mission, but ours is not yet finished.

Our goal is to reach the lost and teach the reached. And so the application for all of us is to ask ourselves today, how often am I thankful for the leaders in this church?

They are godly leaders. I'm thankful for them. Shoot them an email. Send them a text and tell them that. The second point in verses 5 through 32, and I'm only going to read verse 5 in a moment, is get involved and stay involved.

Very simple. You're a Christian. You're part of this church. Get involved and stay involved. It is important. Everyone is needed in the church.

And Nehemiah is a good example of getting God's people involved in something that was unusual at that time. Building walls was not their main vocation. But they did it because it was important in the overall scope of what is going to happen, the revival that will break out in chapters 8 and following.

[20:21] We've all heard these stats that 20% of the people do 80% of the work in the church. One author says this, Hard work spotlights the character of people.

Some turn up their sleeves, some turn up their noses, and some just don't turn up at all. That's been the story sometimes of, I'm sure any pastor, you call for workers in a particular ministry and very few people show up and you can get a little discouraged, can't you?

All of us have probably experienced that from time to time. A British humorist, one person says this, I like work, it fascinates me, I can sit and look at it for hours. That isn't what Nehemiah was calling God's people to do.

He was asking them to get involved in this important project. I think all of us, including myself, understand that there are times and seasons in our lives when maybe you're a mother, you've just given birth, you can't be involved in the church as much as you would like to.

That's fine. There are many other seasons in life where we just can't devote the time that we would like to devote because of maybe employment, responsibilities, something in our family that we need to address, but generally we should have some time in our Christian life to be involved in a church, to support that ministry.

[21:35] And there are many ways to do this. One author says, in the work of God, the greatest accomplishment, accomplishments come from a unity of purpose when people of diverse backgrounds, interests, and abilities, we join together and our common purpose, our common good is that of the gospel.

That is all we need, the gospel and Jesus Christ to join together and say, well, in spite of who we are, we will work together. Verse 5 is an interesting verse. The next section was repaired by the men of Tekoya, but their nobles would not put their shoulder to the work under their supervisors.

So here you have people from out of town, about 10, 11 miles outside of Jerusalem. They took the time to travel. This is more dangerous in Jerusalem. They are safer at home.

They put their own local interest aside and they say, let's do this for the kingdom of God. And so some of the men of Tekoya, the citizens, they zealously got involved and they came from a distance and they took their part in rebuilding this wall.

Nehemiah was motivated and encouraging many people to join hands, but not everyone was willing to work. And throughout the book of Nehemiah, the nobles are the people. Maybe they say, we are a descendant of David.

[22:54] Nehemiah, you're not from us. We are the ones that should be ruling here, not you. But for whatever reason, we don't know their motives. They simply just would not help. And maybe they thought they were too good for this manual labor.

We don't know. But as we think about the hard work that many Christians devote time in ministry in the church, we should be reminded to thank them for their work.

I sometimes don't thank the members of our congregation because if I know someone's very faithful, I know that they're always going to be there. And it's easy to overlook people that are always faithful in the church.

It's important to thank people for all of their work that they've done. And so if you've been involved in this church over the years, thank you for your ministry. I'm sure that your leaders appreciate it. It's important, again, to remind people, grace begets gratitude and gratitude begets involvement.

And there are many ways for all of us to get involved in a local church. God gives us gifts. In Ephesians and in Romans and Corinthians, we read about the unity of God's people and the gifts that have been given to us and that I have a responsibility to use the gift that God has given to me in my church.

[24:04] And so if you're not using your gift or if you're not certain about what your gift is, again, just go to your leaders and say, I want to be involved more in this church. Is there anything that I could do?

Many of you have been serving faithfully for years and that is indeed a blessing. So some came, they got involved and they helped, they were enthusiastic, but some refused to heed the call of Nehemiah to rebuild the walls.

Paul was a tent maker, Jesus a carpenter, but they would not do what Nehemiah had asked them to do. Their loyalty was not to the nation, it was to their own private interests, maybe to their local interests.

And again, there are some Christians like that in the church today. They can have a lone ranger mentality. They want to do everything in their own way and they don't want to submit to leadership and that is also difficult to work with for leaders.

Most were glad to serve. Many certainly were glad to lay down their tools at the end of the day and there's one name mentioned in this text, Barak, who was the opinion, the attitude that when he finished his work he must have gone to Nehemiah and said, what else can I do?

[25:12] You know, that is music to a leader's ears. You have a ministry you're going to do and someone has completed their ministry and they come to you and they say, is there anything else I can do to support the ministry of this church?

That is a blessing to work with people like that. Some did their work at home and that's great. They worked closest to their homes. They could get their food there.

They were right there in the wall. I would want to defend that wall if my family's behind me. Another wise leadership moved by Nehemiah. Again, some did their work at home.

There is a Chinese proverb that says, better to be kind at home than to burn incense in a far place. And Paul says something near that in 1 Timothy 5.4. We should start our ministries first in our homes.

It would be backwards to say, I want to be involved in the church and sacrifice all of my time to the church and then ignore my family. That also wouldn't glorify God. And so Barak, he ministered zealously.

[26:10] We are told in the text, we are told elsewhere in Ecclesiastes, whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might. If God has given you a gift to serve him in his church, do it with all of your might, with all of the power, the grace that God has given to you.

Lazy workers in the church not only rob themselves and the Lord, but they also rob their fellow workers. Again, comparing football to Nehemiah and to the church, one author says about football, it's 22 men who desperately need a rest being watched by millions of people who desperately need exercise.

And sometimes the church can be a little bit like that, right? Church life can sometimes function like a football team. If a coach knows that he has a talented player and the talented player doesn't develop and is lazy, that is extremely frustrating for a coach.

How much more when church leaders see members that are gifted and they have an ability to serve God and for whatever reason, it's just as if you can't get them moving.

That kind of makes pastors sad when they know that there are people that have great ability to serve God and for whatever reason they seem to just never respond to the call.

[27:25] Church is not a place to rest in, is it? We will rest in heaven. We are called to work together and to use the gifts God has given to us for the glory of His church, for the building up not just of walls but of the lives of people.

We are building a people temple and Christ is the cornerstone. I think one author believes that there's one particular word in verse 5, the word neck, that suggests that the simple reason why these particular people would not get involved is because they were too proud.

This is beneath my labor, my dignity or whatever. Paul says in Philippians 3.13, this one thing I do. As an apostle, he apostled with great zeal for all of the days of his calling, didn't he?

Are you doing your part here in this church? Jesus said, Father, I've come to do your will. He completed his Father's will but we are still called to complete the will the Father has for us in our life.

Do you ever notice all of the names in this chapter? We may look at that and say, how does that apply to my life? And it's very simple. Everyone is important in the church.

[28:35] Every name is important in the church. If you're a Christian and God has called you out of the dark world and brought you into his light, you are important. You are needed in the church. List of names are important.

Every Christian has some contribution to make to the Lord's work. There are different kinds of gifts but the same spirit. There are different kinds of service but the same Lord. There are different kinds of workings but the same God works all of them who works all of them in all people.

All these are the work of the one in the same spirit and he gives them to each one just as he determines 1 Corinthians 12. Why are the gifts given?

For the building up of the body. The church ministry is also a building project just as the building of the walls in Jerusalem. Everyone is needed.

All hands on deck in the church. That's the offense. Now secondly in chapter 4, the defense stands strong against disunity. Disunity can happen anywhere can't it? Especially in the church.

[29:42] And so again I have two thoughts for this on how we should address disunity when we are tempted to be united. Number one in verses 1-9 face opposition with faith.

Opposition will come to Christians. It comes to the church. When Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem it was not a pleasant sight to Sanballat and to Tobiah.

They were effectively controlling and manipulating God's people. They had business interests in the city. They were keeping God's people weak and they knew that with the permission for the Persian king that this new governor now had the authority to rebuild the walls.

They knew that this was going to affect them. And do you think that they're going to sit by quietly and not try to attack or disgruntle God's people? They want to divide God's people.

One author said when things are going well get ready for trouble because the enemy doesn't want to see the work of the Lord make progress. This is spiritual warfare isn't it? It's there in Nehemiah and it's present as well in the church.

[30:48] Satan does not want to see church people united praising our Lord Jesus Christ. He wants to see churches that are filled with petty bickering and always complaining about this or that.

Nehemiah arrived in the wall and suddenly there is launched a war of words insults, ridicule, taunts, and even threats in this chapter all meant to demoralize mock and humiliate the people of God.

And Nehemiah's response he says remember the Lord in verse 14 who is great and awesome. Sometimes Nehemiah responds to the critics and other times he doesn't say anything he talks to God.

And I think that comes from Proverbs right? Sometimes we answer a fool and sometimes it's better not to answer a fool. And so here the ridicule starts it's low level soft persecution in chapters 4-6 there are at least nine different tactics the enemy uses to discourage those people from their calling and I think the same tactics Satan uses here in the church around the world to stop us from serving God.

And keep us discontent. Nehemiah 4-1 when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall he became what? Happy? No, he became angry and was greatly incensed.

[32:06] He ridiculed the Jews in the presence of his associates in the army of Samaria. He said what are these feeble Jews doing? Look at all of these mocking questions he says in the presence of the people.

Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from these heaps of rubble burned as they are?

Tobiah the Ammonite who was at his side said what are they building? If even a fox climbed up on it he would break down their walls of stone. Can you imagine if we were living in Jerusalem and how hurtful those words would be because some of the statements contain a little bit of truth in them don't they?

Yes, our city was lying in ruins. And Nehemiah doesn't respond to them at this point he simply says in verses 4-6 he calls out to God Lord hear us our God for we are despised turn their insults back on their own heads give them over as plunder in a land of captivity.

Wisdom helps us to know when we should respond to the enemy and when we should just call out to God. In both situations Nehemiah is always calling out to God. And so if a church is doing things for the kingdom advancing the kingdom opposition it will certainly come and sometimes when there is opposition surrounding the church it may be a sign that God is blessing you and it's a time for growth and new opportunity.

[33:35] Satan wanted to use these problems as weapons to destroy the work but God used them as tools to build his people I like the statement of Charles Spurgeon he says this God had one son without sin but he never had a son without a trial and so we should not expect to live this Christian life without trials without coming under attack from the enemy words can be very effective in helping in discouraging God's people just to give up can't they?

A hurtful word here a hurtful word there and we just say simply I'm done with it Goliath ridiculed David Jesus was mocked by many people including the soldiers at his own trial and this is often the test of a leader when you go through opposition and you face a crisis how do we react?

We see in the life of Jesus he often reacts in a way that is so wonderful for us to follow Jesus will still love his enemies sometimes won't he? From the cross he prays Father forgive them Nehemiah is a prime example in the Old Testament of a leader who is dedicated faithful wise and energetic and even though they lived with opposition they slowly made progress in what God had called them to do we know that they completed the walls in a very short period of time after years of neglect and lying just without anybody working we can't do this God sends a man in after a faithful man had been there for over a decade Ezra teaching God's word and it was time for God to bring revival and the people joined together and they did something they thought they couldn't do in a very short amount of time I think the same principle would perhaps apply to us today we are told many times that if we serve

God in this life we are wasting our time aren't we my own brother told me if you ever become a missionary you're wasting your life and we have family members that sometimes discourage us they think we're fools we're not really living in the real world and there can be all kinds of questions that are asked to us that are rhetorical and they are not an honest question they are insults meant to discourage us psychological warfare some of these walls were nine feet thick and to paraphrase the comment about the fox as if one of the enemies of Nehemiah says I have a little pet chihuahua dog I'm going to take it for a walk tonight but Nehemiah I can't because if he jumps up on your wall it might all crumble down mocking dripping with sarcasm cynical speech words can often hurt and discourage God's people from continuing to serve him in the area he has called us to serve anytime when we face this kind of persecution some of the best things to do is immediately call out to God

Lord help me help me to stay faithful to my task anything anything that keeps you from doing what God has called you to do will only help who? the enemy Tobiah echoed Sanballat's first argument and then exaggerated it unbelievers who ridicule the church often fail to understand that God delights in using feeble and weak people to accomplish his will I have come to appreciate that more and more over the years God delights in using weak churches to do great things in people that you wouldn't think could ever do anything for the Lord they turn out to be a wonderful servant of God and they bless the whole congregation we see their sacrifice in the ministry one pastor many years says in over 40 years of ministry I've learned that in the Lord's work discouragers are often doubters and compromisers there is usually something wrong in their spiritual walk they frequently lack faith in God's word for one thing and they are primarily interested in their own plans and pursuits they are double-minded as James talks about and this kind of reminds us of the enemies of Nehemiah

[37 : 42] Nehemiah doesn't listen to the criticism he helps the people get back to work to what we are called to do do not get distracted the opposition intensifies in verses 7-9 but when Sanballat Tobiah and the rest of his cronies right when the men of Ashad heard that the repairs to Jerusalem's walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed they were very angry and now they plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it this is where the fear intensifies and now the people of Israel they begin to think to themselves maybe we should take a break from what God has called us to do and just let everything die down because now our lives are on the line they may come and attack us they are threatening us they have intensified their anger and after all we are surrounded by enemies in this city it is not a very safe place to live God's people sometimes have difficulty working together we know that but the people of the world seem to have no difficulty uniting against us they often stand united in their opposition against

Jesus Christ and against his church and yet through the grace of God the work progresses even though the people are now getting to be fearful imagine if you live near that wall close to the enemies and they said we're going to come and get your family tonight you may be tempted to stop the work Satan wanted to prevent the Savior Jesus Christ from coming into the world if he could destroy the nation he would frustrate God's plan and this is one of the reasons why Satan throughout the Old Testament is always trying to tempt and harm the people of God he does not want this plan of redemption to be accomplished then our final sub point here in verses 10-23 stick to your calling very simple God has called us it's clear in the New Testament the risen Christ has given us a great commission and we're to stick to that calling in our lifetime every week we come to worship God and we are thankful that we can come and worship God again Nehemiah is a wise leader he makes some adjustments when he realizes that the threats have increased he knows when to change slightly his leadership strategy he adapts to the situation and what does he do he adds some guards he rotates the workforce some men will work with a trowel some men will guard with a spear he says arm yourselves and protect yourselves in verse 10 meanwhile the people in

Judah said the strength of the laborers is giving out and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall you see the doubt coming into the minds of God's people we cannot do what you have called us to do God we're too weak also our enemies said before they know it or see us we will be right there among them and we'll kill them and put an end to the work then the Jews who live near them and came and told us ten times over wherever you turn they will attack us fear has now paralyzed the people of God in some parts of the wall it's better to give up let's appease the enemy therefore I station some of the people behind the lowest parts there's a sword the spears and the bows at the end of verse 13 and what does Nehemiah say in verse 14 don't be afraid of them remember the Lord who is great and awesome and fight for your brothers your sons and your daughters I wonder if you're going to experience a little bit here in America in a secular culture we don't know I hope you don't face things like that I wonder how long it'll be before a pastor is charged with a hate crime and given a prison sentence wouldn't surprise me if we see that in our lifetime I hope that it doesn't happen but there may be times when we too are going to be fearful as a congregation if the tolerance movement becomes more and more intolerant the

Christians once again will be the focus of the blame it's already been happening for years it seems to me that it's just going to get worse unless God in his grace stops that the people seem to think that they are too weak and the task is just too big they are frightened fear paralyzes us it's contagious fear and faith are not supposed to live in the same heart frightened people discourage others read numbers 13 in the report of the spies only a couple of the people said we can do it and the rest infected the whole nation with unbelief and they said no we cannot do what God has told us that we can do Nehemiah assigned weapons I read in Ephesians 6 from the writing of Paul that we too have weapons to use in our spiritual warfare don't we God has given to us weapons we do not fight against flesh and blood but against principalities against Satan and his demons and we must use the spiritual weapons that are given to us by

God as we continue to fight a noble faith the the noble fight of faith in this life and then in Nehemiah 4 verses 15 through 23 that's the final section in this chapter in verse 15 when our enemies heard that we were aware of their plot and that God had frustrated it we all returned to the wall each of us to his own work in verse 18 there was a trumpet here is a communication system right Nehemiah says the guy with a trumpet stays with me if you hear the trumpet you rally around us and there is where we will defeat the enemy and good leaders establish good communication so that everybody knows this is what we do in a case of an emergency took amazing dedication you notice in the last verse in 23 neither I nor my brother brothers nor my men nor the guards with me took off our clothes each of each had his weapon even when he went for water this is an emergency situation shows a great sacrifice and dedication I'm thankful that in the

[43:51] New Testament in the upper room discourse in John 13 14 15 and 16 that our Savior took off his robe he took off his robe in a very similar setting when the disciples are fearful they're confused they're filled with pride and he steps down he kneels down to wash the feet to teach us this is what leadership should look like in the kingdom of God if I was knowing that I was going to die in 48 hours I probably would not want to spend my last 48 hours with a group of men that were arguing amongst themselves right Jesus should have been the one to be ministered to and all of the concerns in his mind and here we see Jesus he is the one comforting his fallen disciples as he himself is about to go to the cross he bends down and kneels down and washes all of the feet even the betrayer of his disciples what an example of leadership Jesus surpasses Nehemiah as he removed his outer garment one author says we who have God on our side not only have the support of the Almighty we serve a cause worth more than our own lives so we can lay down our lives ferociously standing for truth celebrating beauty and acting for goodness Nehemiah is a beautiful example of leadership isn't he and how the people joined together and God's people remained united all through oppositions and trials in their life Nehemiah said our God will fight for us it's at the cross of Jesus

Christ and in his resurrection when our God fought supremely for us in delivering us from our sin he has fought for us in Christ and he continues to fight for his church with a gift of the spirit to indwell his church it's amazing what can be achieved by churches when all the members are committed to the Lord and to one another and this is one of those churches we are thankful to visit from time to time God has been good to you he has kept you unified and I close by returning to our little friend Reepy Cheep the mouse why do you think Lewis brings up this issue of Reepy Cheep in his story he's just a mouse isn't he I think one of the reasons that James Hamilton in his commentary helps all of us and should be an encouragement to all of us is simply this Reepy Cheep represents the weakest and least known Christians who must never think that you can never do anything for God's kingdom the weakest youngest oldest whoever you are

Christians can do great things for God in this life as long as we are driven by grace and determined to keep our eyes fixed on heaven fixed on Jesus Christ Paul says therefore my dear brothers stand firm let nothing move you always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain if you hear this morning and you say I like this idea about standing steadfast you need Jesus Christ in your life before you can stand fast with God's people Nehemiah traveled a long distance from Persia but Jesus Christ came from heaven took upon our flesh became one of us into this earth to restore and rebuild fallen humanity and that construction project is redemptive in its ongoing still today is day of salvation Jesus Christ is the one that brings unity to those who are separated from God he came to establish an eternal city and when

Jesus comes the temple becomes a city and the city becomes a temple and he is the one that unites the people of God and I pray that God would continue to unite you in this church for many years to come father in heaven we thank you for this text of the Old Testament and we pray this morning that you would be honored we pray that you would keep this church unified and growing in the midst of any opposition that comes their way thank you Lord for the godly leaders here for members that have been involved and Lord we pray that you would continue to bless encourage the people here in grace fellowship church we ask this for the glory of your son Jesus Christ amen