

Rise and Build Part 6

We are continuing our Rise and Build series this morning. What a phenomenal Sunday we had last week as the church responded to our capital campaign with pledges of more than \$1.4 million dollars. Over \$423,000 was given in our cash offering last week. Thank you to everyone that gave and everyone that made a pledge to give to the building fund. As we quoted last week from 2 Corinthians 9, Paul said God would bless our giving so we could have bread for food and seed for sowing and so we could be generous on every occasion. Thank you for being generous and may the Lord continue to bless and provide for you as you bless and provide for the Lord's church and his kingdom!

Turn to Nehemiah 4 once again. We are using the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls and gates as a metaphor for rebuilding the walls and gates of our spiritual life. One thing we notice immediately is that anything we attempt for God, any step we take in obeying God and his word, any attempt we make to build God's kingdom, we face opposition. For some of you the devil has probably already tried to oppose your finances if you made a pledge to the building fund. I'm certain that if you've made a commitment to the Lord in the last month to rise and build up your spiritual life, to attend church faithfully, to pray or read your bible daily, even the simplest things, you've been opposed. The truth is **Satan is opposed to your spiritual progress**. I doubt that comes as a new revelation to anyone, but you might need a reminder.

Satan is opposed to your spiritual progress. He is opposed to anyone's spiritual progress. He is opposed to us building and growing as a church. He is opposed to your giving. He is opposed to you rebuilding the gates of your life and placing Jesus upon the throne of your life. He is opposed to you taking any step of faith and obeying God.

In Nehemiah's case, they were making progress on the wall and the enemy was not pleased. **"So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart."** Nehemiah 4:6 That sounds great doesn't it? They were working with all their heart, excited about the building, excited to see progress. They were motivated and fired up to start with. But then, it starts to get a little more difficult. Fatigue begins to take a toll and the enemy starts interfering. **"But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the men of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem's walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry. They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it."** Nehemiah 4:7-8

Notice, they were determined to plot against them, to fight against them, and to stir up trouble. It may feel like everything and everyone is coming against you, coming together to defeat you and keep you from serving God and growing in him. You may have made a commitment to the Lord and it feels like all of hell has been unleashed against you. Let me tell you, the devil isn't playing games. Look at verse 11. **“Also our enemies said, ‘Before they know it or see us, we will be right there among them and will kill them and put an end to the work.’”** Nehemiah 4:11 The devil means business and he will do whatever it takes to stop you, defeat you, to destroy you if he can!

Jesus said the devil has come to kill, steal and destroy. He will stir up trouble anywhere, anytime, any way he can. I'll warn you right now, any church going into a building program has a target on their back. The devil will stir up trouble. He will try to get us to fight with one another. He will look for ways to divide us, to wear us down if he can. Look what happened to Nehemiah's workers.

They lost their strength. Verse 6 tells us the walls were half way up. The people had worked with all their heart but verse 10 tells us **“The strength of the laborers is giving out and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall.”** It's that way with life. Life gets hard and difficult some times. Living for Jesus gets hard. Staying surrendered to the Lord and living a life of obedience, it isn't easy. Rebuilding your life, rebuilding your marriage, growing spiritually, serving the Lord, it is an all day every day kind of life. They lost their strength. It just felt like too much.

They lost their vision of what could be. Verse 10 indicates they stopped focusing on the walls that were half way up now and started focusing on the rubble left to be removed. They stopped looking at what could be, on what would be if they remained faithful to the Lord and to the task, and started focusing on the rubble at hand. No, it's not easy. This church doesn't promise you that it will be easy to serve the Lord and live for him. It means taking up a cross and following Jesus. It won't be easy, but it will be eternally better, richer, greater. Keep your sights on what will be if you remain faithful. Wayne Myers said “Only those who see the invisible can do the impossible.” Keep your eyes on Jesus. Keep trusting in his mercy and grace and his provision. See what can be by faith and don't give up. Don't let discouragement or fatigue effect your vision.

They lost their confidence. They were tired. The work had become more difficult. They were being threatened by their enemies. We read the threat in verse 11 that “before you know what is happening we will be among you and we will kill you!” Sanballat and the other enemies made sure the people heard about their threats. Look at verse 12, **“Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, ‘Wherever you turn, they will attack us.’”** **Nehemiah 4:12** Ten times over. “Yeah, we got it.” “Thanks for telling us.” “You know you can’t run and hide because wherever you turn, they’ll be right there to kill you.” “Thanks for sharing.” “Really? I hadn’t heard. Thanks for coming by.” Ten times over!! It all looked hopeless. So what did Nehemiah do? Several things. First...

Nehemiah called a prayer meeting. This wasn’t just Nehemiah praying this time, like in the past. This time they all prayed. **“But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.”** **Nehemiah 4:9** It should be the first thing we do when we are under attack or under a threat. Pray! Call others to pray! There is power in prayer. Seek the Lord’s direction. Ask for his wisdom and guidance. Pray!

Nehemiah confronted their fear with faith. This wasn’t an existential threat. This was real. Swords, spears and bows and arrows had been handed out to the families. Everyone knew there were real enemies threatening to kill them, yet Nehemiah’s confidence in the Lord was not shaken. We talked about this briefly last Sunday. Nehemiah posted guards, surveyed the situation and then said, **“Don’t be afraid of them. Remember the Lord who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.”** **Nehemiah 4:14** Don’t let fear dominate you or your thinking or your life. Remember the Lord. Have faith in the great and awesome God we serve. Remind yourself who you serve and who your Father is. Remember who and what you are fighting for. You’re fighting for your spiritual life. You are fighting for your eternal destiny. You are fighting for your family. Fight fear with faith. You have nothing to fear when the Lord is on your side.

Nehemiah posted a guard. Nehemiah took practical steps and posted armed guards. Verse 9 says they prayed and posted a guard! Verse 13 tells us he posted people at the exposed places, at the lowest places. Verse 16 says, **“From that day on, half of my men did the work while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor...those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked.”** **Nehemiah 4:16-18**

I told you at the beginning the devil wasn't playing games. He means to destroy you if he can. We don't have to become pre-occupied with the devil, but we are to be aware of his schemes, of what he is up to. That means we have to be on guard.

Lori Fullbright spoke to our Sunshine group on Thursday and talked about various scams that are being used around Tulsa. It was eye-opening. Armed with knowledge and awareness you refuse to be a victim, to scams and to the devil. Be aware and post a guard over your life.

Nehemiah had guards posted at places where they were most vulnerable. Do you know the vulnerable places in your life? Are there areas where the walls of protection are down in your life, in your personality? You need to post a guard there. You need to minimize exposure.

Notice he said "from that day on." Nehemiah and the people made a decision. "Today is the day! From this day on we are going to live differently. From this day on we are going to live with discipline." If you recognize that the devil is trying to destroy you and if you know there are exposed places and weakened places in the walls of your life, you need to grab your spiritual weapons – prayer, the word of God, faith, worship, and decide, "From this day on I'm going to guard my heart and my life from the enemy." Stop being an easy target for the devil!

Nehemiah connected the people. Nehemiah knew the danger of the people being spread out, disconnected from each other, making them more vulnerable to attack, so look what he did. He said, "**The work is extensive and spread out and we are widely separated from each other along the wall. Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us!**" **Nehemiah 4:19-20.** If you look back at verse 18, Nehemiah mentioned "But the man who sounded the trumpet stayed with me." Nehemiah was ready to call the people together, to fight the enemy, to fight for each other at a moment's notice. At the first sign of trouble, the first indication of an enemy attack, Nehemiah had the trumpeter sound the shofar and everyone would run toward the sound of the trumpet. It became a rallying point, a rallying place for the people.

The point is, the enemy wants to pick us off one at a time so we need each other. It's about relationships. In some sense our services on Sunday or Wednesday are rallying points, a place to bring us together as we worship and are taught the word of God. But we need more than that. We need to build relationships, in life groups, in Sunday school classes and connect groups, anywhere we can meet together, connect with each other so when anyone of us is under attack we can rally and help meet the need. We have to get connected and build relationships.

Gary Green has started the 4 men and a mat program, men praying for men in small groups. Right now there are 91 men in the church signed up. In small groups they agree to a time and they pray for each other, for their families, for their pastors and their church.

It brings us back to the beginning. Nehemiah started by calling a prayer meeting. Pray, post a guard, connect with God's people, keep your spiritual weapons handy -- those spiritual disciplines that help you live for God and make wise and obedient choices -- keep those by your side, meet up at the rallying point, with God's people, to worship, to pray, to study, to make progress together. It's how we are going to rise and build as individuals and as a church.

Look back at verse 16 once again. **“From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor.”** Then in verse 22 he says, **“Have every man and his helper stay inside Jerusalem at night, so they can serve us as guards by night and workmen by day.’ Neither I nor my brothers nor my men nor the guards with me took off our clothes; each had his weapon, even when he went for water.”**

It sounds to me like they had each other's backs. Half worked while the other half guarded and kept an eye out for enemy attacks. If they heard the trumpet they dropped what they were doing and ran to the sound, running to fight for each other. They never let down their guard, even if they went to draw water. They were determined they were not going to be caught off guard, unprepared. They were not going to let their families be killed or carried off into exile again. They were going to fight for their own lives and for their brothers and sisters and families.

Let me ask you, How determined are you? How determined are you to resist the devil and rebuild the spiritual walls in your life? How determined are you to fight for your family? Your marriage? Your relationship with God? Are you determined enough to post a guard? To do whatever it takes?

We are in this together. Nehemiah said “Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us!” Are you willing to run to the sound of the trumpet to pray for and fight for others?

Who is under attack right now? Can we rally and pray for one another? Let's sound the trumpet and fight for our brothers and sisters! Let's rise and build, together!