

Nehemiah Sermon #11

Turn in your Bibles to the Book of Nehemiah – Nehemiah, Chapter 4 – Opposition
Chapter

The work on the walls was halfway done when Sanballat and his cohorts began their
campaign to hinder the work of God.

So far Nehemiah has held the people together against the enemy on the outside.

Today we will see what troubles arise from within.

The Apostle Paul warned the Church (Acts 20) about the outside troubles and the inside
troubles.

Does trouble ever arise from within the church?

Sure it does – from gossip to false teaching

But we will see today some different internal problems.

I have entitled today's message "Trouble Without and Trouble Within"

Nehemiah 4:10

Let us stand for the reading of God's Holy Word

Nehemiah 4:10-23

Let us pray.

You may be seated.

Trouble Without and Trouble Within

Sanballat was always first in the line-up of enemies.

He was against this wall project for two reasons.

He was concerned politically and financially.

But there was a greater enemy working behind the scenes and his name is Satan.

Satan hates the Jews and has used one nation after another try to destroy them. You see this in Revelation 12.

God chose the Jews to be His vehicle for giving the world the knowledge of the true God, the Scriptures, and the Savior (Rom. 9:1-5).

Today, He has given that task to the Church—that is the Church's responsibility.

But back then, "Salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22), and Satan wanted to prevent the Savior from coming into the world.

If he could destroy the nation of Israel, he would frustrate God's plan.

Referring to Satan, Paul wrote, "For we are not ignorant of his devices" (II Cor. 2:11).

This chapter presents a number of Satan's devices for opposing the Lord's work.

We are going to see two of them today—discouragement and fear.

This chapter tells us how God's people can be steadfast and defeat the enemy.

The principle is this: If we start building, we will soon be battling; so be prepared!

Chapter 4 shows how Nehemiah encountered both danger from without (vs. 1-9) and discouragement from within – vs. 10-23 and continuing throughout chapter 5.

Notice the source of the problem—the people of Judah – vs. 10

We know that Judah was not just any tribe among the people of Israel.

Judah was the leader.

Why did this discouragement arise from the royal tribe of Judah?

They had David's blood in their veins, and you would think they would be men and women of great faith and courage.

The answer is found in Nehemiah 6:17-19: Some people in the tribe of Judah were secretly cooperating with the enemy.

The ties of marriage (family ties) were stronger than the bonds of commitment to the Lord.

According to Nehemiah 13, some of the leaders of Judah were more interested in making money than being devoted to God.

The combination of family ties and finances divided their loyalties, and they became the cause of discouragement.

We discover four causes for Israel's discouragement in vs. 10.

I. The first cause was a Loss of Strength – Decayed

See the word *decayed*? . . . “stumbling, staggering, failing” – lose strength

“These people had been working a long time, and they are getting tired.”

How long had they been building this wall?

For at least a month, the Jews had been exerting all the energy they could muster.

They had no fresh recruits, no “coffee breaks,” and no “long weekends” or “days off.” Physical and mental fatigue was obvious and they were failing in strength.

It's certainly understandable why the children of Israel began to lose their physical and emotional momentum.

So the first cause of discouragement was the workers were weary.

How many of us are weary this morning?
Honestly—we are on our way to discouragement.

II. The second cause of discouragement is a Loss of Vision – distracted

Did you notice what Judah said? “There is much rubbish” (4:10).

We look around, Nehemiah, and all we can see is debris—dirt, broken stones, dried chunks of mortar—just a mess.

We are getting tired. There’s too much rubbish.”

What were they looking at?

There are times I come into this building and I look – cracks in the wall, lopsided building.

Negative – critical – start to get discouraged

What should I think about?

What’s been done so far?

The people that God is building

See, a wrong focus will lead to discouragement

Moms, the house is a mess; dishes in the sink

III. The third cause of discouragement is a Loss of Confidence – Disheartened

Vs. 10 – We are not able to do this

Perhaps the most devastating cause of discouragement is an obvious loss of confidence.

Nehemiah’s workers became weary and disillusioned.

The wall was halfway up. Rubbish was strewn everywhere.

When we lose strength and we lose vision, then we lose confidence.

“We can’t do it!” And we want to give up. We want to quit.

In vs. 6, the people had a heart to work.

But now *they lost their heart*. Disheartened!

When we lose our confidence, we lose our heart; we lose our motivation – that overwhelming, discouraging sense that we are never going to catch up, get ahead, overcome – so what’s the use? – marriage, finances, churches.

IV. The fourth cause of discouragement is a Loss of Security – Deflated

The final cause for discouragement in the case of these Jews was a loss of their feelings of security.

Verse 11 – What a scare tactic!

Have you ever wanted to run away?

New commercial – Southwest Airlines – “Want to get away?”

What a desire we have to escape life and problems, to get away from life’s demands, pressures

Oftentimes the world says and the friends say – bail out!

Lost strength, lost vision, lost confidence

And now they have lost security. “It isn’t worth it.”

Discouragement is indeed an internal disease. It starts with the germs of self-doubt.

Through fear and exaggerations, the germs begin to grow and multiply.

Soon we lose our way, we weaken, and we run and hide.

If it continues, we become virtually useless and downright defeated.

We become easy prey for the enemy of our souls to take charge and nullify our efforts. It can happen almost overnight.

It was discouragement that kept Israel from entering the Promised Land . . . (Num. 13).

“We are not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we”
(v. 31).

The ten unbelieving spies “discouraged the heart of the children of Israel”; and as a result, the nation wandered in the wilderness forty years until the new generation was ready to conquer the land.

“We are not able!” is the rallying cry of all who take their eyes off the Lord and start looking at themselves and their problems.

How many times have we told ourselves “we cannot do it”?

We need people in our lives who say “you can do it.”

Not only was discouragement coming from Judah, but verse 12 tells us of another source of discouragement.

Vs. 12

It’s important to note that the discouraging information came from people who lived “near” them.

We cannot constantly hear negativism without having some of it rub off on you.

If we are prone to discouragement, we can’t run the risk of spending a lot of our time with people who traffic in discouraging words.

Nehemiah’s discouragement came first from Judah and next from those Jews who lived near the critics because they kept hearing those threats day after day.

In fact, we read in verse 12 that these Jews came and warned Nehemiah ten times of the dangers of continuing the wall project.

It was just a matter of time.

The rumors of impending surprise attack added to the discouragement

Of course, that is what the enemies intended.

External pressure amplifies internal weakness.

This rumor mixed fear with the discouragement.

Fear paralyzes, fear is contagious, fear paralyzes others.

Fear and faith cannot live together in the same heart.

Jesus asked, "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" (Matt. 8:26)

This repetitive threat fuels the fear and helps the people become paranoid.

Against this backdrop, we can understand why they were ready to give up.

What would you do?

First, Nehemiah responds to the discouragement.

Nehemiah did not ignore the discouragement. Nehemiah faced his problems head-on.

Nehemiah didn't hide his head in the sand.

We can't ignore discouragement. It's like ignoring a flat tire.

Nehemiah rolled up his sleeves like a good leader and dealt with the discouragement.

Nehemiah took definite action. He took charge.

That's a basic job of the leader! – vs. 13

Nehemiah placed a watch in two locations.

First in the hollows, the lower places behind the wall, and then, secondly, in the higher places (v. 13).

Nehemiah's first step was to post guards at the most conspicuous and vulnerable places on the wall.

He grouped them according to families which would strengthen the motivation to fight.

He “tightened the ranks” and thereby encouraged the people.

They could now see the presence of protection.

That will do a lot to stop discouragement.

Secondly - Nehemiah directed their attention to the Lord.

They were looking at the rubbish. They were looking at themselves.

They needed to be looking to the Lord.

Nehemiah saw their fear in vs. 13 and look what he said in vs. 14, “I rose and spoke . .

“Do not be afraid of them; remember the Lord who is great and awesome . . .”

The phrase, “Remember the Lord,” sounds good.

A lot of leaders have adopted this saying as a rallying cry – “Remember the Alamo!” –

the **main**

What does this mean to “remember the Lord”?

We remember the Lord by remembering what the Lord has said.

We can remember the Lord by calling to mind who He is – great and awesome.

People who are discouraged are thinking mainly about one thing—*themselves*.

Leave the Lord out and defeat is certain, but bring the Lord into the situation and victory is on its way.

Nehemiah encouraged the people not to be afraid but to look to the Lord for help.

He also reminded the people in vs.14 that they were fighting for their nation, their families, and their homes.

Nehemiah called the people together (vs. 14a) which had the effect of showing their strength and giving Nehemiah an opportunity to encourage them by emphasizing God’s great delivering power and by appealing to the defense of their families.

“Don’t be afraid” . . . words of reassurance and victory:

Exod. 14:13 – Moses – “Fear not, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord.”

Deut. 31:6 – “Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.”

It has been said that “when the going gets tough, the tough get going.”

Nehemiah certainly modeled this in his own life.

Though he must have been feeling much of the same discouragement and fear, he couldn’t allow a deteriorating situation to alter his objectives and his motivation. He had to hold his head high. He couldn’t and wouldn’t give up!

He knew God had led him to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall.

He wasn’t about to forsake the divinely appointed task that God had given him.

It was at this moment that Nehemiah shouted with all the energy he could muster,

“Remember the Lord who is great and awesome” (4:14).

Nehemiah was reminding the children of Israel that God had helped them before when all seemed hopeless and He would help them again.

He was their God!

Nehemiah charged the people to “fight.”

He reminded them that they were not simply engaged in a battle for themselves but for others—their “brothers,” their “sons,” their “daughters,” their “wives.”

They were fighting for the very places in which they lived—their own “houses.”

The Bible continually exhorts us to stand, to contend for the faith, to be strong in the fight, and to be good soldiers.

Vs. 15

When the enemies realized they could not surprise the Jews, their plot withered away because “God had frustrated it.”

God used Nehemiah’s faith and leadership, but it was God who brought success and Nehemiah says so.

Then, Nehemiah reported happily – vs. 15e

Nehemiah’s leadership philosophy becomes clear.

He prayed, he trusted God, he worked hard, he motivated people, he faced problems head-on!

Though he knew God was unquestionably on their side, he never presumed on God’s supernatural care.

He beefed up his efforts at being prepared for a surprise attack.

Vs. 16-17

Half of the people worked while the other half watched, and special arrangements were made to cover the hours of darkness.

The people labored together, with a weapon in one hand and a tool in the other, and so the work went forward and prospered.

Vs. 18-20

His confidence went deeper: Our God will fight for us (20).

This does not mean that the Jews should not fight.

The people were prepared to fight.

This means God would assist them in their fight.

He knew the truth of Psalm 127: “Unless the Lord builds . . . Unless the Lord watches over the city . . . It is in vain.”

The man with the trumpet stayed close to Nehemiah so the alarm could be given immediately.

Vs. 21

“So we labored in the work” (v. 21)

They certainly worked longer than eight hours – the people labored!

Everyone worked diligently—from the crack of “dawn until the stars appeared” (v. 21).

Every minute of daylight was now precious, but darkness must not undo the day’s achievements.

Vs. 22

Those living outside the city didn’t even return to their homes.

Rather, they spent the night in Jerusalem, laboring by day and guarding by night.

Vs. 23

Nehemiah emerges here as a leader.

He set a strong example of what he had urged others to do.

Nehemiah not only organized the workers and guards and encouraged them to trust the Lord, but he also set the right kind of example before them.

He was a leader who served and a servant who led.

He stayed on the job and was alert at all times.

All Christians need good models and proper teaching.

Nehemiah says, “When we took a bath we took off our clothes.”

Otherwise we never removed our clothes—day or night.

Trouble Without and Trouble Within

Author and finisher

Let us stand for closing invitation.

Christian, are you discouraged?

Are you weary?

Are you ready to quit?

Trouble is a part of life

Look to the Lord – remember the Lord – what He has done and who He is

If you are not a Christian, look to the Lord Jesus

He came to save sinners

Look at the Cross

Look at the empty tomb

Look at yourself – sinner – believe on Him and be saved.