

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 3-8-15 PM NOTES  
"THE PRAYERS OF NEHEMIAH" (PART 2)  
NEHEMIAH 4, 6  
# 9 in Series, "Learning to Pray From the Experts"

"Most [leaders] want to be liked and appreciated by their followers. When their motives are routinely questioned, or when their actions are misjudged, the joy drains out of their leadership position, and they are left questioning whether their calling is worth the pain. Whereas the most loyal friends can be sporadic in their affirmation, opponents can be like a dripping faucet, relentlessly communicating their displeasure."  
—Henry Blackaby

I. The Opposition

"Often the crowd does not recognize a leader until he has gone, and then they build a monument for him with the stones they threw at him in life."  
—Oswald Sanders

A. Ridicule (4:1-3)

B. Discouragement (4:7-12)

1. Fatigue (v. 10a)

2. Focus (v. 10b)

C. Diversion (6:1-4)

If the Devil can't stop you as a roaring lion, he will come as an angel of light.

D. Defamation (6:5-8)

II. The Response (4:4-6, 9; 6:9, 14; 13:14, 22b, 29, 31b)

A. Prayer (4:4-5; 6:9, 14; 13:14, 22b, 29, 31b)

Boldness in prayer comes out of a surrendered heart that is convinced of God's will.

**Nehemiah 6:9b (NKJV)** "Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands."

**Nehemiah 6:14 (NIV)** "Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, because of what they have done; remember also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who have been trying to intimidate me."

**Nehemiah 13:14 (NIV)** "Remember me for this, O my God, and do not blot out what I have so faithfully done for the house of my God and its services."

When you advance on your knees, you never have to retreat.

B. Perseverance (4:6, 9)

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I had planned to only take one message to deal with the prayers of Nehemiah, but there are so many rich truths about prayer in this book that I felt strongly that we should do at least two messages. In case you weren't able to be here in the last message that dealt with Nehemiah 1-2, let me take a moment to review. Nehemiah was a Jew who had been born in captivity. The Jews had been taken captive from the land of Judah about 140 years before the events in the book of Nehemiah take place. Nehemiah, a Jew, is a high official under the Persian King, Artaxerxes. Many years earlier, the Persian king, Cyrus had allowed a sizable contingent of the Jews to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple which had been destroyed when the Jews had been taken captive. Nehemiah had it made in Persia. He had influence with the most powerful earthly ruler and a job that would be coveted by almost everyone in the country. But Nehemiah was a worshipper of the one true God and his God had other plans for him. God guided Nehemiah by placing a burden on him, a really strong burden to go back to the homeland of his ancestors and rebuild the wall around Jerusalem. As we saw last week, a city without walls was a city with no protection and no status. In the last message we learned some really important lessons about prayer from how God gave Nehemiah this burden and then how God, through prayer, overcame insurmountable obstacles to make a way for Nehemiah to go to Jerusalem to lead in rebuilding the walls. There is no explanation as to how Nehemiah was allowed to do this other than the fact that God initiated and then answered specific prayer.

In the section of Nehemiah that we will be examining in this message, we will see Nehemiah leading in rebuilding the wall and how prayer was answered in dealing with the huge amount of opposition he faced in finishing the assignment given to him by God. Learn this lesson well. When our God gives us a task to accomplish, it will require power beyond our fleshly efforts. We can also be sure that when we set out to accomplish God's will, there will be opposition – lots of opposition. This should never catch us by surprise! Just as God is real, Satan is also real. When God tells Nehemiah to build, Satan marshals his forces to blast. If we are in the sweet center of God's will, we should never be surprised when we face opposition – sometimes fierce opposition. There is a line in Martin Luther's hymn, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” that says, “For still our ancient foe doeth seek to work us woe”. When God's leader says, “Let us move forward”, Satan and his demons say, “Let us place obstacles in their way”. Henry Blackaby in his book *Spiritual Leadership* (page 248) says, “Most [leaders] want to be liked and appreciated by their followers. When their motives are routinely questioned, or when their actions are misjudged, the joy drains out of their leadership position, and they are left questioning whether their calling is worth the pain. Whereas the most loyal friends can be sporadic in their affirmation, opponents can be like a dripping faucet, relentlessly communicating their displeasure” (Henry Blackaby). That is so true! Opposition often comes from without and often comes from within, but sometimes opposition comes from both without and within. That is what Nehemiah experienced.

The question for us is not, “Will I face opposition in obeying God?” The question is “How will you handle the opposition that will come?” Nehemiah, as we will see in this message, faced the opposition with **prayer and perseverance**. Prayer was woven into the very fabric of his life and he refused to give in to the temptation to quit or back off.

## I. The Opposition

I want this message to major on Nehemiah's prayer, but we cannot really appreciate his prayer apart from seeing the ferocity and the frequency of his opposition. You may not be a high ranking official or a powerful leader like Nehemiah was, but what God has given you to do is important in His eyes. You may be a Mother trying to raise her children in a way that honors God. The children (especially as they get older) won't like many of your choices, and sometimes they will temporarily reject you. One of my wife's favorite sayings when her decisions were opposed by our children was, “It's not a popularity contest”. If

you have a leadership position in the business world and your desire is to glorify God and operate with integrity, you will face opposition. If you have a leadership position or a ministry in the church, you will face opposition. All who seek to obey God completely will face opposition! When you take decisive action, you will be accused of being reactionary. When you wait on what you believe to be God's timing, you will be accused of being indecisive. Don't be shocked by these things. Jonathan Edwards was one of the greatest minds America has ever produced. He lived in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in colonial New England and pastored the prestigious Congregational Church in Northampton MA. He was the primary leader in the First Great Awakening that swept across the American Colonies. He was a great theologian and his writings are more popular today than ever before. Yet, even Jonathan Edwards faced unrelenting opposition. Because of his insistence that church members give evidence that they had experienced genuine conversion, a group of members got upset with him and started a slander campaign. Eventually, he was dismissed from his church! One of the greatest and Godliest men ever born in America was fired from his leadership position because of ungodly opposition. It is interesting that he was later vindicated as some of his most vocal opponents publicly confessed their sin. Ultimately Edwards became the President of Princeton University, but it doesn't always turn out that well. Oswald Sanders said, "Often the crowd does not recognize a leader until he has gone, and then they build a monument for him with the stones they threw at him in life" [Quoted in Henry Blackaby, "Spiritual Leadership" p248].

Nehemiah's opposition came in four ways.

#### A. Ridicule (4:1-3)

It is interesting that ridicule was the enemy's first attack. The fear of ridicule is a powerful deterrent to a courageous obedience to God. The goal of ridicule is to make the task look impossible and those attempting a great work to look ignorant. No one wants to waste their time or money on something impossible and no one wants to appear ignorant. Ridicule demoralizes people and so you would expect that the enemy would use it generously. In verse 1, they "mocked the Jews". In verse 2, he refers to "these feeble Jews". The "sacrifices" probably refer to sacrifices of thanksgiving when the task is completed. The ridicule is that he is saying, "Why would they have reason to sacrifice? They will never complete the wall." They ridiculed based on the impossibility of the task. Do not be shocked or intimidated by ridicule, mockery, or intimidation attempts.

#### B. Discouragement (4:7-12)

Notice what discouraged the people who were rebuilding the wall.

##### 1. Fatigue (V10a)

That word "failing" means to stagger or totter. Back in verse 6 we see that the wall was now half built. The half way point in any undertaking the Lord leads you to take on is a dangerous point. Fatigue sets in and the end is not yet close. Half way up a mountain is where many climbers turn back. Half way through a building project is a dangerous point. The halfway point of our life can easily become a point of discouragement. We even call it a "mid-life crisis". When you are fatigued, everything looks bleak and all the negatives are exaggerated. Someone described these people as being "worn out, weighted down, and worried".

##### 2. Focus (V10b)

Their focus had turned from the finished product to the "rubbish" (the obstacles). There was a lot of rubbish. Not only was there rubbish, there were the threats from the enemy (V8, 11). In verse 9 a watch was set up. The people had lost their vision and the obstacles (attack from the enemy, the immensity of the work that was left to do) loomed large. In verse 6 it says that the people had a mind to work, but in verse 10 we find that they lost their mind – there was no longer a mind to work and discouragement was prevailing. There will be times when you will become discouraged. That is why you must continue coming back to focus on what God has given you to do. When the seemingly endless details become our focus, we lose sight of the goal, the vision God has called us to. When the perfunctory things and the hard things and the obstacles steal our focus, we become discouraged.

#### C. Diversion (6:1-4)

Much had been accomplished, but much was left to do. There were many gates and they were usually covered with metal to prevent them from being burned by enemy attackers. A wall without gates was of minimal benefit. Ono was an area about 20 miles North of Jerusalem. These enemies said, “Stop the work and let’s talk. We don’t have to be enemies; we can work together”. Learn this principle: If the Devil can’t stop you as a roaring lion, he will come as an angel of light. If threats and intimidation don’t work, he will try deceit and subterfuge. Beware of ways that the enemy will seek to divert you from the task God has called you to. Parents, you have a call from God to raise up children in the training and admonition of the Lord (Eph 6:4). That is a God sized task that requires huge amounts of time, energy, creativity, and focus. But it is so easy to get diverted and so involved in other things (even good things) and we begin to forsake the calling of God. I have watched people over the years that have a burden and a call from God for a certain ministry. They carried out that ministry with passion and resolve and saw God at work in touching people’s lives. Then they got involved in other things, not necessarily bad things, but things that diverted them from what God called them to do and soon the ministry was neglected and then dropped. The enemy is always trying to sidetrack you from that to which God called you. The enemy said to Nehemiah, “Stop the work and come meet with us in Ono”. Nehemiah said, “Oh no” to Ono.

#### D. Defamation (6:5-8)

This “open letter” was sort of like a petition or a letter to the editor of the Newspaper. It was read publicly for all to hear. Nehemiah’s motives were slandered. The enemies said, “You are just on a big ego trip trying to have your own kingdom and we are telling King Ahasuerus”. Have you ever had someone slander your motives or use innuendo to call them into question? I have. I will never forget the phone call when we were building this building and the caller who didn’t like what was going on said, “Are you sure you’re not just trying to build your little kingdom on the hill and keep up with \_\_\_\_\_” (named another church in our area who had recently built a new worship center). A major tool of the enemy to discourage people with a vision and call from God is to slander their motives. Someone said that the number one enemy of Christian unity is the tongue. One reason this tactic is so effective is that people are so quick to believe the worst about others without checking it out. Nehemiah didn’t give in to this tactic of the enemy. He issued a firm denial and went on with the work God gave him to do.

## II. The Response (4:4-6, 9; 6:9, 14; 13:14, 22b, 29, 31b)

Nehemiah didn’t back off because of opposition. He seems to have expected the opposition. He responded with a two pronged attack. I am convinced that this is the way we should always respond when we are obeying what God has told us to do and opposition comes. Nehemiah responded with prayer and perseverance.

### A. Prayer (4:4-5; 6:9, 14; 13:14, 22b, 29, 31b)

One of the things that we learn from Nehemiah’s prayers is that they are not especially lengthy or eloquent. He gets right to the point. His prayer here might sound overly harsh and blunt to some. Keep in mind that this prayer is being offered by a man who has been given a supernatural burden by God to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem. He has seen God supernaturally work in a powerful king’s heart to cause this king known for never changing his mind, to actually change his mind and give Nehemiah permission to rebuild the walls and to give him all of the provisions he would need to accomplish this task. Basically, Nehemiah viewed this attack as an attack against God Himself. He just told God on his critics! Boldness in prayer comes out of a surrendered heart that is convinced of God’s will. When we are certain that we are doing God’s will, then opposition against us in accomplishing that God given task is in reality opposition against God. The key is being sure that what you are doing is the will of God. Some people think they have to justify themselves after every attack. Tell God on them; it’s His task you are doing and His will you are following. He is the One who has to bring the vision to pass. He is very capable of dealing with the one seeking to stop the accomplishment of the God given task.

As we move through the book of Nehemiah we find several more instances of Nehemiah praying in response to opposition in accomplishing his God given task. We see Nehemiah praying for strength in **Nehemiah 6:9b (NKJV)** “Now therefore, *O God*, strengthen my hands.” Nehemiah gets right to the

point. There is no extra verbiage in his prayers. In **Nehemiah 6:14 (NIV)** Nehemiah again tells God on those who were opposing him. Have you ever just told God on those opposing you and then just left them in God's hands? "Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, because of what they have done; remember also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who have been trying to intimidate me." Because he was a man of prayer, Nehemiah was impossible to intimidate. In **Nehemiah 13:14 (NIV)** Nehemiah prays a bold prayer. "Remember me for this, O my God, and do not blot out what I have so faithfully done for the house of my God and its services." He is reminding God that he has done all of this for God's honor! He says basically the same thing in Nehemiah 13:22 and 31b. Is that not a little "self centered" or "self serving"? No, not at all! Here is a man who believes that God blesses obedience. He was looking to the Lord for his reward and not to profiting materially from his position as governor.

Nehemiah fought his battles primarily through prayer. Someone has well said, "When you advance on your knees, you never have to retreat". Nehemiah is "Exhibit A" for that truth. Nehemiah saw all that happened (the "large" things as well as the seemingly "small" things) in a spiritual framework where God is in charge and only God can ultimately deal with that which concerns us. What a simple, but accurate way to look at life. When faced with an "impossible situation", Nehemiah prayed. When faced with a much "less serious" situation where the workers were discouraged, he prayed. Nehemiah lived in the **atmosphere of prayer**. This is what I long for. Last Friday, February 27, 2015, I was making a hospital visit to the old Tenova hospital in North Knoxville. This was before I knew what the message was going to be tonight. The snow was mostly melted, but there was still some snow on the Hospital staff parking lot (yes, Pastors are allowed to park there). The lot was fairly full and after I pulled into a "head to head" parking place on a slight decline, I discovered that the left rear wheel of my "not a 4 wheel drive truck" was on a batch of "black ice". I put it in reverse and all I got was spin. I was about a foot from the bumper of the car in front of me. I breathed a prayer and refused to get upset at my stupidity. I went on in and made the visit. I actually forgot about my predicament until I walked out into the parking lot. I tried again to get out and only a spinning tire. I took my ice scrapper and tried to dig out the ice under the tire which was a lost cause. I was praying. I saw some decorative gravel in an island on the lot and tried putting them under the wheel for some traction but they were too big. As I sat in the truck out of options, I just prayed and out of nowhere it seemed a man walked in front of the truck, smiled, and said something to the order of, "Hang on; that's my car in front of you and I'm leaving". Of all the probably 100-150 vehicles in that parking lot, not at shift change, the one guy whose car was in front of mine comes out. He backed out and I just put the truck in drive and of I headed toward Powell. I am not saying that this was "God's favor on me". It was God's mercy on me. It may have been his plan to teach me patience and to be more careful where I park next time while I had to wait several hours for the guy across from me to leave. I share that illustration to say we need to live in an atmosphere of prayer in big things and little things because **they are all little things to God**.

Nehemiah's response was prayer.

#### B. Perseverance (4:6, 9)

Because Nehemiah lived in an atmosphere of prayer, nothing could stop him. He just got the people back to the work of finishing the wall. He didn't ignore the problem or the threats. He prayed and set up guards to warn if an attack came from the enemies. That's such a simple and yet biblical approach to life. When opposition comes, when discouragement comes, when enemies come, pray and with perseverance respond with whatever it takes to get the job done. May the Lord give us leaders like that in our church, our homes and in the workplace. Pray, persevere, do what God has given you to do.