

Nehemiah 2:9-4:23 “Pray, Preach, and Work”
Psalm 149
1 Corinthians 3

February 24, 2019

Read the story in chapters 2 and 4 [come back to 3 in the sermon]

Why do I preach so much from the Old Testament?

Because that’s what the apostles’ both practiced *and* commanded.

When the apostles set out to preach *Christ and him crucified* –

they had to explain to Gentile hearers why a Jewish “Messiah” mattered to Gentiles!

What does it mean to be a Christian?

You cannot make sense of Christian identity

without understanding the story of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,

the story of Moses and the Exodus,

the story of the Judges and the failure of Israel,

the story of David and Solomon and the building of the temple,

the story of the divided Kingdom and the failure of the kings,

the story of the Exile and the restoration – the new Exodus under Zerubbabel,

and the story of the rebuilding of Jerusalem –

and the rebuilding of the people of God, under Ezra and Nehemiah.

The Gentiles who put their faith in Jesus

were not just believing in something God did in their generation –

they were believing in something God had been doing for thousands of years!

When you became a Christian,

you were *grafted in* to Israel –

through baptism into Christ, you were joined to the family of Abraham (Gal 3:28)

and became “heirs together with Israel, members of one body,

sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus” (as Paul says in Eph. 3:6)

The weapons of our warfare are spiritual weapons –

but they are weapons nonetheless!

And so just as Nehemiah’s laborers worked with the weapons beside them,

even so must we.

And that’s why we sing Psalm 149A this morning –

because we are to have “the high praises of God” in our throats,

“and two-edged swords” in our hands,

as we execute the judgment that is written!

We fight not against flesh and blood –
but our warfare is against the principalities and powers –
against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.
So let us join our voices with Nehemiah in Psalm 149A

Sing Psalm 149 (TPH 149A)
Read 1 Corinthians 3

Paul speaks of himself as a “skilled master builder” who has laid the foundation.
Now other pastors are continuing to build on that foundation.
But Paul says “Let each one take care how he builds upon it.”

You can see in Paul’s language a similar distinction between leaders and people
that you see in Ezra-Nehemiah.

One of the important themes in the book of Ezra-Nehemiah is the place of the people of God.
Ezra has come to study, to do, and to teach the Law of God.
But it is the *people of God* who do what God commands.
Nehemiah has come to Jerusalem – as verse 12 says –
to do “what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem.”

But as verse 16 says, it was the *people* “who were to do the work.”

Why is this so important?

Well, think back to the Exodus.
God delivered his people from slavery in Egypt through Moses.
He gave them the Promised Land through Joshua.
Then what happened?
What happened during the time of the Judges –
when there was no king in Israel?
Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

But what happens in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah?
There is no king in Israel –
but the people of God build the temple, worship their God,
build the wall, trust their God –
and generally *do what God says!!*

Think about the difference between Moses and Ezra.
Ezra has sometimes been called a “a second Moses” –
but he never stands in between God and Israel the way Moses did!
Moses has a mediatorial function that Ezra never does.

Or think about Joshua.

God had said to Joshua, “you will cause Israel to inherit the land.”
If Joshua fails, Israel doesn’t inherit. Period.

Nehemiah is never seen that way.

Ezra and Nehemiah are, in that way, much more like NT pastors.
They lead and they teach and they pray –
but they are not “covenant mediators.”

David was called to be the Son of God – to do and to be all that Israel had failed to do and to be.
Nehemiah is called to help Israel build a wall.

In some respects, Nehemiah has a very small job (compared to Moses, Joshua, or David),
but that’s because Nehemiah needs Jesus – just like the rest of us!

He is called to pray, to preach, and to work – just like the rest of us.

1. The Plan for Building Christ’s Kingdom (2:9-20)

a. Seeking the Welfare of the People of Israel (v9-10)

⁹ Then I came to the governors of the province Beyond the River and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen. ¹⁰ But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant heard this, it displeased them greatly that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel.

So he came to the governors of the province Beyond the River and gave them the king’s letters.
But the governor in Samaria (Sanballat) is *not* happy about it.

Why does it displease Sanballat and Tobiah?

Well, after the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem,
their neighbors had tried to take over.

Think about it –
since there is no *wall*, who controls the land?

It’s contested land.

The Jews have rebuilt their temple –
thereby laying claim to the temple mount –
but there are still conflicting claims.

And that’s why Sanballat is important.

Sanballat the Horonite is the governor of Samaria – and he is an Israelite
(though with a very Persian-sounding name).

Horonite means “from Horon” –
and Beth-Horon was a city in Ephraim, near Mt. Gerizim.

By this time, the Samaritans had already built their temple on Mt. Gerizim

(archeological excavations indicate that it was built in the first half of the 5th c., so it had just been finished when Ezra came to Jerusalem).
In other words, Sanballat – or his immediate predecessor –
has just finished the Samaritan temple at Gerizim –
and now Nehemiah shows up with plans to expand *Jerusalem's* influence.

And there are others!

We know from other ancient documents (Elephantine papyri) that Sanballat's sons were asked to help rebuild the Jewish temple at Elephantine in Egypt. (Elephantine is the southernmost city in Egypt, and it appears that Jewish troops were sent there around 600 B.C., back when Judah and Egypt were allies – in order to guard Egypt's southern border).

The Jews in Elephantine had built a temple – probably after the destruction of Solomon's temple – and from the Elephantine papyri, it is clear that they saw their temple as the continuation of the Jerusalem temple. It was destroyed by marauders during the chaos of the Persian conquest of Egypt.

We have letters from around the time of Nehemiah – including one from a certain Hananiah (the name of Nehemiah's brother), written from Jerusalem, urging the Jews of Elephantine to keep the Passover.

I mention all this to give you just a window into the world of Nehemiah.

You have Sanballat the Horonite – the Israelite governor of Samaria – who wants to encourage what he would call a more 'ecumenical' approach – but his 'ecumenism' would blend the worship of Yahweh with the worship of other gods.

There is also this Jewish community in southern Egypt that wants their own temple.

What is it going to mean for Nehemiah to follow Christ and to seek first the kingdom of God in a world where everyone is doing what is right in their own eyes?

b. Inspecting the Walls by Night (v11-16)

¹¹ So I went to Jerusalem and was there three days. ¹² Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. And I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem. There was no animal with me but the one on which I rode. ¹³ I went out by night by the Valley Gate to the Dragon Spring and to the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that were broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire. ¹⁴ Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but there was no room for the animal that was under me to pass. ¹⁵ Then I went up in the night by the valley and inspected the wall, and I turned back and entered by the Valley

Gate, and so returned. ¹⁶ And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, and I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest who were to do the work.

This may help us make sense of why Nehemiah engages in his nighttime inspection.

He comes to Jerusalem and spends three days figuring out the lay of the land.

Why does he not tell anyone what he is doing?

Because Nehemiah *knows* that Sanballat and Tobiah are hostile.

Nehemiah understands that there are competing claims to Jerusalem.

There are competing claims for the religious allegiance of God's people.

Quite likely, Nehemiah also knows that if they delay –

if Sanballat appeals to the King,

the King will probably insist that *everyone* be part of the project!

The only way for the city to be restored as the Holy City of the LORD

is if they can do it quickly –

and without compromising with the surrounding nations.

So Nehemiah says:

c. The God of Heaven Will Make Us Prosper (v17-20)

¹⁷ Then I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision.” ¹⁸ And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me. And they said, “Let us rise up and build.” So they strengthened their hands for the good work.

Notice the response of the people!

When they hear of God's blessing upon Nehemiah – and also of the words of the King – they said, “Let us rise up and build.”

We also live in a world where there are competing claims

for the religious allegiance of God's people!

The good thing is that there are *many* faithful churches that preach Christ well.

But the problem is that there are others that very much like Sanballat –

those that “Christian” in name – but are no longer faithful to Christ.

They have abandoned Christian doctrine and practice –

preferring to be a hybrid of Christian and non-Christian.

And let me be clear – when I say they have abandoned Christian doctrine and practice,

I mean that they have abandoned the teaching of the Apostles Creed,

and the Nicene Creed.

It's not whether they recite the creeds –

but whether they teach what the Church of Jesus Christ has always taught!

And when it comes to practice, it's about the practices taught in the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments.

Do we pray, preach, and work in the way that Christ and his apostles taught us?

Because when you do, you can expect trouble.

Verse 19 foreshadows the opposition that comes out more fully in chapter 4:

¹⁹ But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they jeered at us and despised us and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?"

Remember that Nehemiah has already showed his letters to Sanballat.

Indeed, it seems as though Sanballat has *confiscated his letters* –
(remember verse 9 – “I gave them the king's letters”)
because Sanballat is now acting as though the letters don't exist!

When you set out to pray, preach, and work –
when you set out to build Christ's kingdom (instead of your own) –
you will encounter opposition.

There are those who despise the Kingdom of Christ –
and they will mock you and jeer at you –
claiming that your distinctive Christian beliefs and practices
are in rebellion against the king!

Genuine Christian faith and practice will often be perceived as rebellion.
Of course, we already know (from Nehemiah chapter 1)
that Nehemiah has the approval of the king!
Because genuine Christian faith and practice will *in fact* not be rebellious!

And Nehemiah's reply clearly distinguishes between those who seek God's kingdom –
and those who are hostile:

²⁰ Then I replied to them, "The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim^[a] in Jerusalem."

Nehemiah distinguishes between those who worship the God of heaven
and those – like Sanballat – who have compromised the gospel
for the sake of political power.

2. The Work of Building Christ's Kingdom (3:1-32)

We can't just skip chapter 3.

But I wanted you to be able to hear it aright.

God could have given us a couple quick sentences to say – “and they built the wall.”

But instead he gave us a whole chapter.

This is a community development project.

You see everyone get involved –

well, not *quite* everyone!

The nobles of the Tekoites “would not stoop to serve their Lord.”

Even in this great work of restoring the city of Jerusalem,
there are some who fear man more than God.

But as you listen to chapter three –

I want you to see how the people of God came together to build.

Some just repaired the wall next to their own houses –

others took responsibility for longer stretches.

Many came from other towns and cities

(the men of Jericho, Gibeon, Mizpah, and more).

3 Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests, and they built the Sheep Gate. They consecrated it and set its doors.

Chapter 3 begins and ends with the Sheep Gate.

That's not an accident.

Jerusalem is the City of David – the Shepherd King –

whose most famous song is “The LORD Is My Shepherd” – Psalm 23.

If you think about it –

Nehemiah 3 illustrates Psalm 23 very well:

“you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies” –

God's protection and provision does *not mean* that you don't face troubles.

It means that he is with you in the midst of the troubles!

Yea, though I walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death

I will fear no evil, for you are with me –

your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

They consecrated it as far as the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Tower of Hananel.

You might not think much of that line –

but that is the fulfillment of the Word of the LORD to Jeremiah – in Jeremiah 31,

as a part of the prophecy of the coming of the new covenant –

In Jeremiah 31:31, the LORD says that the days are coming

“when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah,

not like the covenant that I made with their fathers

on the day when I took them by the hand
to bring them out of the land of Egypt,
my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD.”

The promise of the New Covenant, with the forgiveness of sins, goes on to say in v38,
“Behold the days are coming, declares the LORD,
when the city shall be rebuilt for the LORD
from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate...”

What we see here in Nehemiah 3 is a *partial* fulfillment of Jeremiah 31.
But Nehemiah plainly sees it as the *initial* fulfillment –
the beginning of the coming of this “new covenant.”
It will take another 500 years until the coming of the Christ –
but verse 1 makes clear that this is a *beginning!*

And then throughout chapter 3,
we hear about ordinary folk – the names may sound odd to our ears,
but these are just everyday ordinary people whose names are set down in Scripture
so that you might remember that *your* ordinary, everyday life
is significant and valuable to God –
simply in its everyday, ordinary faithfulness.

But as you listen to these ancient Jewish names, you could substitute modern ones:
next to him Phyllis Mould built the 2s and 3s up in sitting quietly and loving Jesus
and next to her, Betty Rowley built the 4s to 7s in knowing their bible stories,
and next to her, Sally Hanson built the 2nd and 3rd graders in the shorter catechism

² And next to him the men of Jericho built. And next to them^[b] Zaccur the son of Imri built.
³ The sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate. They laid its beams and set its doors, its bolts, and
its bars. ⁴ And next to them Meremoth the son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz repaired. And next to them
Meshullam the son of Berechiah, son of Meshezabel repaired. And next to them Zadok the son of
Baana repaired. ⁵ And next to them the Tekoites repaired, but their nobles would not stoop to
serve their Lord.

The ordinary folk from Tekoa show up – but the nobles do not.

⁶ Joiada the son of Paseah and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah repaired the Gate of
Yeshanah.^[d] They laid its beams and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars. ⁷ And next to them
repaired Melatiah the Gibeonite and Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon and of Mizpah,
the seat of the governor of the province Beyond the River. ⁸ Next to them Uzziel the son of
Harhaiah, goldsmiths, repaired. Next to him Hananiah, one of the perfumers, repaired, and they
restored Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall.

The reference to the “Broad Wall” is significant.

As I’ve already suggested, this is a very partial restoration.

The walls in Nehemiah’s day enclose less than half of the city
as it had existed in the heyday of the kings.

Notice that the Broad Wall is referred to as a point along the line of the wall.

In earlier times, the Broad Wall had extended westward to enclose a large area.

But as we will see in coming chapters,

Jerusalem has a very small population,
so they don’t need a very big wall!

⁹ *Next to them Rephaiah the son of Hur, ruler of half the district of^{f^e} Jerusalem, repaired.*

¹⁰ *Next to them Jedaiah the son of Harumaph repaired opposite his house. And next to him Hattush the son of Hashabneiah repaired. ¹¹ Malchijah the son of Harim and Hasshub the son of Pahath-moab repaired another section and the Tower of the Ovens. ¹² Next to him Shallum the son of Hallohesh, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, repaired, he and his daughters.*

With all of the references to “sons”

we need to note Shallum and his *daughters*.

We need to remember that in Hebrew the masculine plural is gender neutral.

When you say “sons” or “men” or “brothers”
the plural includes men and women alike.

So we should see that this rebuilding project is not done by a bunch of guys –
and this one guy’s daughters!

Rather, it is the whole community.

¹³ *Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the Valley Gate. They rebuilt it and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars, and repaired a thousand cubits^[1] of the wall, as far as the Dung Gate.*

¹⁴ *Malchijah the son of Rechab, ruler of the district of Beth-haccherem, repaired the Dung Gate. He rebuilt it and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars.*

As you might imagine, the “Dung Gate” was named for what went *out* of the city that way –
just like the Sheep Gate was named for what went *into* the city that way...

Not surprisingly the “Dung Gate” was at the lowest part of the city –
so that the refuse would not pollute their water supply!

(Ancient peoples did not understand germ theory,
but they understood just fine that you want to drink *upstream*
from where you do your other business!)

¹⁵ *And Shallum the son of Col-hozeh, ruler of the district of Mizpah, repaired the Fountain Gate.*

He rebuilt it and covered it and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars. And he built the wall of the Pool of Shelah of the king's garden, as far as the stairs that go down from the city of David.

¹⁶ After him Nehemiah the son of Azbuk, ruler of half the district of Beth-zur, repaired to a point opposite the tombs of David, as far as the artificial pool, and as far as the house of the mighty men.

¹⁷ After him the Levites repaired: Rehum the son of Bani. Next to him Hashabiah, ruler of half the district of Keilah, repaired for his district. ¹⁸ After him their brothers repaired: Bavvai the son of Henadad, ruler of half the district of Keilah. ¹⁹ Next to him Ezer the son of Jeshua, ruler of Mizpah, repaired another section opposite the ascent to the armory at the buttress.^[g]

²⁰ After him Baruch the son of Zabbai repaired^[h] another section from the buttress to the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest. ²¹ After him Meremoth the son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz repaired another section from the door of the house of Eliashib to the end of the house of Eliashib.

²² After him the priests, the men of the surrounding area, repaired. ²³ After them Benjamin and Hasshub repaired opposite their house. After them Azariah the son of Maaseiah, son of Ananiah repaired beside his own house. ²⁴ After him Binnui the son of Henadad repaired another section, from the house of Azariah to the buttress and to the corner. ²⁵ Palal the son of Uzai repaired opposite the buttress and the tower projecting from the upper house of the king at the court of the guard. After him Pedaiah the son of Parosh ²⁶ and the temple servants living on Ophel repaired to a point opposite the Water Gate on the east and the projecting tower. ²⁷ After him the Tekoites repaired another section opposite the great projecting tower as far as the wall of Ophel.

Notice that the men of Tekoa are named a second time.

Apparently the absence of their nobles prompted them to work twice as hard,
so they finished their first assignment and then looked for something else to do!

But you can see throughout these lists

that there is a lot of variety in the amount that each group did.

Some people repaired a lot.

Some people repaired a little.

But the question isn't whether you do a lot or a little!

Nehemiah 3 says that the people showed up and did what they could!

²⁸ Above the Horse Gate the priests repaired, each one opposite his own house. ²⁹ After them Zadok the son of Immer repaired opposite his own house. After him Shemaiah the son of Shecaniah, the keeper of the East Gate, repaired. ³⁰ After him Hananiah the son of Shelemiah and Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph repaired another section. After him Meshullam the son of Berechiah repaired opposite his chamber. ³¹ After him Malchijah, one of the goldsmiths, repaired as far as the house of the temple servants and of the merchants, opposite the Muster Gate,^[i] and to the upper chamber of the corner. ³² And between the upper chamber of the corner and the Sheep Gate the goldsmiths and the merchants repaired.

Notice how widespread the work is.

You have priests, Levites, temple servants, goldsmiths, merchants,

farmers from outlying towns –
rulers from various regions (even people coming without their rulers!!).

The whole community comes together to build the walls.

We'll hear in chapter 6 that it took 52 days to complete the wall.

That's just over 7 weeks.

That's remarkable speed.

This is the sixth month of the Jewish calendar

(roughly mid-Aug to mid-Sept in ours).

If you think about the agricultural cycle in Israel,

this is during the summer just before the wheat harvest.

The seventh month is the Feast of Booths –

so they seem to be working to finish the wall

in time to go harvest their fields.

But their speed also has another cause:

namely, the opposition of those around them!

And that's what we see in chapter 4.

3. How Do You Respond to Opposition to Christ's Kingdom? (4:1-23)

a. The Jeers of the Enemies and the Prayer of Nehemiah (v1-6)

⁴ *[i]* Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged, and he jeered at the Jews.

Sanballat and Tobiah start jeering and mocking them.

² *And he said in the presence of his brothers and of the army of Samaria, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore it for themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish up in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, and burned ones at that?"*

³ *Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, "Yes, what they are building—if a fox goes up on it he will break down their stone wall!"*

The picture here is of the governor of Samaria bringing his army down to Jerusalem to mock and to intimidate the people who are building.

This is not just ordinary jeering from some low-lives.

This is a threat from a powerful ruler who has the ability to really hurt you!

And so Nehemiah prays:

⁴ *Hear, O our God, for we are despised. Turn back their taunt on their own heads and give them up to be plundered in a land where they are captives.* ⁵ *Do not cover their guilt, and let not their*

sin be blotted out from your sight, for they have provoked you to anger in the presence of the builders.

This is an imprecatory prayer – asking God to judge Sanballat and Tobiah.

At first you might think – “it’s not very forgiving” –
but if you think about it,
if Sanballat had come up to Nehemiah and said,
“I’m sorry, that was wrong of me – would you forgive me?”

Nehemiah would have cheerfully and easily forgiven him!

When we pray, in the Lord’s prayer, “Thy Kingdom come” –
we pray that the Kingdom of Satan would be destroyed –
and that the Kingdom of Christ would be advanced.
If the Kingdom of Christ is going to advance in this age –
then there are many kingdoms that will and *must* fall!

Churches that have protected sexual predators *must fall*
if the Kingdom of Christ is to advance.

(read) ⁶ *So we built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.*

When the wall reaches half its height, it is *more* than halfway finished!

b. The Threats of the Enemies and the Exhortation of Nehemiah (v7-14)

⁷ ^[U] *But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and that the breaches were beginning to be closed, they were very angry. ⁸ And they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it.*

Verses 7-14 then work through the obstacles at the end of the building.

First there are the plots of Judah’s neighbors –
the Samaritans, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites.

And to that obstacle (verse 9):

⁹ *And we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection against them day and night.*

Pray and Work.

Trust and Obey – for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey!

But then the strength of the laborers begins to fail:

¹⁰ *In Judah it was said, ^[m] “The strength of those who bear the burdens is failing. There is too*

much rubble. By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall.”

People start to question Nehemiah’s plan.

Can we do this by ourselves?

Maybe we should include the Samaritans – and others.

¹¹ And our enemies said, “They will not know or see till we come among them and kill them and stop the work.” ¹² At that time the Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said to us ten times, “You must return to us.”

And then the enemies planned a sneak attack –

but various Jews who lived near them heard about it and warned the people.

(Of course, their counsel was – abandon Jerusalem and return to your homes!)

But instead, Nehemiah responds by stationing people behind the weakest parts of the wall, and he said (verse 14):

¹³ So in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in open places, I stationed the people by their clans, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. ¹⁴ And I looked and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, “Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes.”

Remember the Lord.

This is the most important thing in building up the church!

Remember the Lord.

The moment we forget him is the moment that go astray!

Remember the Lord!

...who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers...

They are ready to fight to defend their city.

c. Watch and Work (v15-23)

¹⁵ When our enemies heard that it was known to us and that God had frustrated their plan, we all returned to the wall, each to his work. ¹⁶ From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction, and half held the spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. And the leaders stood behind the whole house of Judah, ¹⁷ who were building on the wall. Those who carried burdens were loaded in such a way that each labored on the work with one hand and held his weapon with the other. ¹⁸ And each of the builders had his sword strapped at his side while he built. The man who sounded the trumpet was beside me. ¹⁹ And I said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, “The work is great and widely spread, and we are separated on the wall, far from one another. ²⁰ In the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us.”

So when the enemies heard that God had frustrated their plans,
they gave up.

But Nehemiah is worried that they will still try something,
so he orders the builders to keep their weapons at hand,
so that they can fight quickly if there is any sneak attack.
And Nehemiah keeps a trumpeter with him at all times,
so that if there is an attack, he can sound the alarm immediately!

²¹ So we labored at the work, and half of them held the spears from the break of dawn until the stars came out. ²² I also said to the people at that time, "Let every man and his servant pass the night within Jerusalem, that they may be a guard for us by night and may labor by day." ²³ So neither I nor my brothers nor my servants nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us took off our clothes; each kept his weapon at his right hand.

And further, Nehemiah orders the men to stay in Jerusalem at night
(rather than return to the villages around the city),
so that the city is never unprotected.

Why does God give us such a detailed account of the rebuilding of Jerusalem?
Because "Jerusalem, so carefully rebuilt and repaired by Nehemiah
and by those who helped him,
is the physical center of the Messiah's work for the salvation of the entire world"
(Levering, 138)
And Jerusalem's physical meaning will even be taken up into the very flesh of Jesus
when Jesus says "destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."
Jesus is himself the temple –
and we as living stones, are built into a temple – a holy dwelling place for God.

And just as the walls of Jerusalem protected the ancient people of God from their enemies,
so also we are protected by the church's teaching on faith, hope, and love.
The church has walls to protect the flock from the ravenous wolves
that would seek to devour the sheep.

Our walls consist of the apostles' teaching.
We talk about the "keys of the kingdom" that Christ gave his disciples –
whereby through preaching and the sacraments,
we open Christ's kingdom to those who believe;
and through preaching and discipline,
we close Christ's kingdom against those who rebel.

Churches that have no discipline are like cities without walls –
they have no protection from their enemies!