



NEHEMIAH WEEK 5: GROWING THROUGH OPPOSITION: NEHEMIAH'S SECRET

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TEXT:

When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews, and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, "What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble—burned as they are?"

Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, "What they are building—even a fox climbing up on it would break down their wall of stones!"

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. Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from your sight, for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders.

So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart.

But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the people 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. But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.

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."

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."

Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, "Wherever you turn, they will attack us."

Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families, with their swords, spears and bows. After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your families, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes."

When our enemies heard that we were aware of their plot and that God had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to our own work.

From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah who were building the wall. 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. But the man who sounded the trumpet stayed with me.

Then I said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "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!"

So we continued the work with half the men holding spears, from the first light of dawn till the stars came out. At that time I also said to the people, "Have every man and his helper stay inside Jerusalem at night, so they can serve us as guards by night and as workers 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. (Nehemiah 4:1-23)

OPPOSITION IS INEVITABLE...AND IMPORTANT.

- Before Nehemiah arrived, Ezra experienced it when he returned to rebuild the Temple
- The opposition was largely governmental: local governors and officials
- Whenever the people of God do the work of God, they will experience opposition
- *Illustration: When speaking with people who are church hopping/shopping Pastors get lots of questions about their churches (stance on sexuality, worship style(s), etc.) They always get questions about style, but almost never get the question: "What's your church's perspective on Jesus?" When you make a statement as a pastor or a church that Jesus is the only way to God it brings a sharp response, more so than political or social issues.*
- Preaching Jesus leads to direct and swift opposition
- Nothing rouses the Enemy more than when we worship Jesus and pray for His will to be done.
- *Illustration: In Biosphere 2, large trees would topple at a certain size because there was no wind in the enclosed biodome. No wind meant there were no deep tree roots.*



Biosphere 2 is located in Arizona. It opened in 1991 as a center for basic research in sustainable habitats isolated from the surrounding environment.

- It's obvious: opposition makes you stronger. It's part of God's plan for making strong people.
- As Christians, we can often try to sanitize our lives of opposition. You can't be a fully mature Christian without the "winds" of some opposition. Stop trying to create an environment free of wind.
- "The blood of the saints is the seed of the Church." –Tertullian

THREE IMPORTANT QUESTIONS ABOUT OPPOSITION:

Are you opposed to opposition?

- Do you wish your life were free of opposition and if so, why?
- Jesus anticipated opposition (Luke 6:26); "Woe to you..."
- The prophets were hated and killed. The bigger the tasks, the stronger the opposition.

Are you being opposed for the right reasons?

- Opposition does not always indicate that we were doing the right thing
- "It's not the penalty that makes the martyr, it's the cause." –Augustine
- *Illustration: A young man approached evangelism by quoting Bible passages that cornered people into agreeing with him that they were terrible. No one wanted to talk with him. He was opposed because he was obnoxious, not because he was advocating for Jesus.*

Are we prepared for opposition?

- Can we embrace the right kind of opposition?
- Ungodly reactions to opposition include...
 - Fear: Pharisees and Sadducees opposed Jesus because they were afraid of the crowds. Crucify fear. Nehemiah, "Do not be afraid of them and remember your God.
 - Purification: Zealots sought to eliminate sin and sinners Jesus response is the Parable of the Wheat and Tares. (Matt. 13:24-30)
 - Separation: The Essenes withdrew from the opposition of the World. Jesus didn't run away, he leaned in. (John 1:14)

HOW DOES NEHEMIAH DEAL WITH OPPOSITION?

- He recognizes the voice of the Enemy
 - Sanballot's questions are reminiscent of the Devil's question in Chapter 3 of Genesis
 - The Enemy always embeds a subversive idea in his questions
 - He will always seek to give you a counterfeit of something God has already given you. See Luke 4:1-13, where Jesus is offered the kingdoms of the world, something he already has.
- Nehemiah gives his response in kind. He understands the ways of his enemies.

HOW TO ACTIVELY OPPOSE THE OPPOSITION OF THE ENEMY:

- Know that the Evil One is there. He has a will for your life and it is not good.
- Know what authority you have. Nehemiah had received letters of authority from Artaxerxes. He had the authority and the favor of God. The Enemy only has the authority we give him.
- Pray without ceasing. Verses 4:1-3 catalog the opposition, but in verse 4:4, Nehemiah breaks out in prayer without delay or introduction. Nehemiah meets demonic opposition with prayer.
- Nehemiah prioritized worship. The Temple was built first before the walls were repaired.
- Nehemiah chose to fight offensively and defensively. With one hand they built a defensive wall, but in the other they had a sword.
 - Paul counsels the same in Ephesians 5. The armor of God includes mostly defensive equipment with one offensive weapon, the Sword of the Spirit.
 - What God has said undoes the work of the Enemy, and we say with Jesus, "It is written..."
- Nehemiah left room for the wrath and judgment of God. Nehemiah never seeks revenge. He entrusts justice and final judgment to the Lord. Our anger never brings about the will of God in a way that honors Him. We do not need to bring the wrath of God, but only the mercy of God. After Paul; "When you are cursed, your job is to bless."

"Jesus Christ was born in a stable. He had to flee into Egypt. Thirty years of his life were spent in a workshop. He suffered hunger, thirst, and weariness. He was poor, despised, and miserable. He taught the truths of heaven, and no one would listen to him. The great and the wise persecuted and took him, subjected him to frightful torments, treated him as a slave, and put him to death between two criminals. They chose to give liberty to a robber rather than allow him to escape. Such was the life that our Lord chose. We, on the other hand, are horrified at any kind of humiliation and cannot bear the slightest appearance of contempt." – François Fénelon

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What, or who, has opposed you before? What was that like? What do you think raised the opposition?
2. How would you answer the three questions posed in the message?
 - Are you opposed to opposition?
 - Are you being opposed for the right reasons?
 - Are you prepared for opposition?
3. Why do you think Nehemiah's first response to opposition was prayer?
4. Do you think the opposition to Nehemiah's work was merely human and why, or why not?
5. How do you relate the teaching that a personal Enemy and his demonic followers resists the work of God?
6. Do you see certain opposition in your life as demonic, and if so, how so? What in your experience, including your reading of Scripture, confirms that this is actually happening?
7. How can you tell when it's evil spirits resisting you or if it's just you being kind of a jerk?
8. How have you fought back against spiritual opposition. What's worked for you and how?
9. What do you think about the idea of going on offense and actually taking the fight to the enemy? Do you see your self doing the and why or why not?