

DEALING WITH DISCOURAGEMENT

Nehemiah 4

James Boice: old Quaker farmer trying to plow his field with his mule; the mule refused to move. Quaker decides to talk to him "reasonably": "Thou knowest I am a Quaker. Thou knowest I can't curse thee. Thou knowest I can't whip thee. What thou dost not know is that I can sell thee to my neighbor down the road. He is no Quaker, and he can beat the living daylights out of thee." [That's how Quaker dealt with obstacle!]

PREPARATION FOR RECONSTRUCTION 1-2

PROCESS OF RECONSTRUCTION 3-6:14

In 4-6, Nehemiah has to handle obstacles to rebuilding walls.

**When the work begins on the wall,
obstacles begin to appear quickly.**

**When you begin to do God's work,
opposition will *NEVER* be far behind.**

First obstacles come from *the outside*. 4

1st OBSTACLE: RIDICULE 4:1-6

–PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE

The Problem–1-3

Sanballat and Tobiah never did like this project

2:10 ... *they were very much disturbed that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites.*

So they start to mock them

2:19 ... *they mocked and ridiculed us. "What is this you are doing?" they asked. "Are you rebelling against the king?"*

They don't expect much to happen.

Israel's been back long time; nothing happened
Now word comes back: *the wall is really going up!*

1 *When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed.*

He ridicules them—probably in hearing of Jews

If they make fun of them,

it might discourage them and stop them

4:1b-2 *He ridiculed the Jews, 2 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?”*

"Feeble" Jews—you can't pull this off!

Are you going to make sacrifices?

=> try to pay off your God to do it for you?

You think you'll get a miracle and pull it off in a day?

You think you can make something worthwhile out of that pile of rubble?

3 *Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, “What they are building—if even a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones!”*

A fox is a light-footed animal

—even a light-footed fox will knock it down!

It's going to be such a feeble wall it will be a pushover.

It won't keep out any enemy worth fighting.

Why are they opposing the effort?

They're afraid they will be successful!

Critical mistake: Tobiah refers to it as "*their*" wall.

It's not *their* wall, it's *God's* wall! —*crucial difference!*

Today also

- when we begin to accomplish meaningful ministry
- when lives are being changed—opposition will arise.

The opposition *often* takes the form of ridicule.

Remedy 4:4-6 *Hear us, O our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. 5 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.*

Nehemiah does NOT argue with the enemy!

He doesn't fight back—That'd lower him to level of critics.

Nehemiah DOES turn the problem over to God!

Quiet voice of prayer from Nehemiah **Phil 4:6-7**—*"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God, and the peace of God that surpasses all comprehension shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*

He doesn't just bottle up his feelings. He doesn't "stuff" it!

He lets it all hang out *before the Lord*

We're never more successful

than when we're on our knees in prayer!

Nothing's less successful than getting in shouting match!

If you want to accomplish something, shut your mouth.

Take the matter to God; turn it over to Him!

This is God's cause. *He* can handle the enemies!

The people are discouraged—demoralized.

They've been working hard. They're getting tired.

Their efforts aren't appreciated by people around them.

People expecting **praise from grandstand** have long wait.

**Doing God's work God's way
seldom earns applause from the stands.**

Nehemiah dedicates himself to accomplishing the task God assigned to him

4:6 *So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart.*

Leaving the enemy in God's hands, he goes back to work.

Progress involves prayer and work—BOTH!

YOU do what God tells YOU to do!

We can't worry about whether others do their part.

Nehemiah dedicates self to motivate people.

The enemy is trying to demoralize them

—get them to focus on impossibility of the task.

Nehemiah motivates them to keep working;

to trust God for the results.

Theodore Roosevelt: "It is not the critic who counts; ...

The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena;
whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood;
who strives valiantly; ...

who, at worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly."

How do you deal with psychological warfare?

- 1. Don't argue with the enemy,**
- 2. Do turn your problem over to God.**
- 3. Commit yourself to do whatever God tells you with all your heart.**

**Attempt to demoralize the people fails because
God intervenes and gives people mind to work.**

They throw themselves into it enthusiastically

2nd OBSTACLE: CONSPIRACY 4:7-23

—PHYSICAL THREAT OF VIOLENCE

The Problem 7-11

They face a conspiracy to destroy the project
4:7-8 *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. 8 They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it.*

Size of enemy's forces is growing:

Samaria to N. Arabs to S. Ammon to E.

Ashdod (Philistia) to W. Coalition surrounds them!

They're tired 10a 10 *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."*

Their strength's failing; they've been at this for a *long* time.

Progress seems slow; discouragement is setting in.

They're focusing on the trash 10b

Mother sees messy diapers, instead of child developing.

We look at mess in our lives, instead of what God's doing.

When we focus on the rubbish, we get discouraged!

They recognize the impossibility of the task 10
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."

The project is more than they're capable of handling.

They're afraid 11-14 *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.” 12 Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us **ten times** over, “Wherever you turn, they will attack us.” ... 14 After I looked things over, I stood up and said ... **“Don’t be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome...”***

Ten times they’re warned—war of nerves going on.

They’re going to infiltrate the camp.

God uses such moments of discouragement and fear to prepare us for the greatest moments of our lives.

Spurgeon: Before great achievement, some measure of depression is normal... Such was my experience when I became pastor in London.... the curtain was rising on my lifework.... This depression comes over me whenever the Lord is preparing a larger blessing for my ministry."

The remedy 9-33

How to deal with enemies that threaten us:

1. Take the threat to God—let God handle it!

9 But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.

He teaches them to join him in prayer about conspiracy.

2. Remind yourself Who is on our side! **4:14 *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...”*****

YAHWEH-great & AWESOME God is with us!

He knows Who’s on their side!

3. Prepare a united defense

to protect your forces from the enemy

He sets a watch against them day and night.

4:9 *But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.*

He sets up families with swords on wall.

13 *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.*

Half do the work—half use their weapons.

4:16-17a *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 Judah¹⁷ who were building the wall. . . .*

Everyone works with one hand; holds weapon in other.

4:17b-18a *Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other,*

Defense includes group support—unite to fight.

Trumpet call brings everyone to place of attack to help.

18b-20 *...and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked. But the man who sounded the trumpet stayed with me.*

¹⁹ *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.²⁰ Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us!”*

They aren't to take on the enemy alone!

They're to support each other.

God will fight battle—but not without them!

Don't go out to your villages at night—stay in the city.

22 *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 workmen by day.”*

They carry weapons even when they go for water.

23 *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.*

They're always ready for an enemy attack!

4. Organize your resources to finish the task God gave you.

Everyone works with one hand; holds weapon in other.

He doesn't let need for defense distract him from work.

He doesn't give up; *he knows GOD sent him to build wall*

Enemies recognize **God has frustrated their plan**

15 *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 his own work.*

The enemy's counting on advantage of a *sneak* attack

Since Israel knows, requires battle enemy isn't ready for.

We must be on constant guard against our enemy

They're ready to catch us off guard and destroy us.

Ultimately, God fights our battles for us.

20 *Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. **Our God will fight for us!***

WE can't win (10), but **He** can (14-15, 20)

That points our attention to most important lesson in this passage:

LESSONS FOR US TODAY

If we think we can fight spiritual battles in our own strength,
 we're deceiving ourselves. **I can't do it; neither can you!**
 Nehemiah's victory assumes that he's leading GOD's people.
 They aren't acceptable to God because of THEIR efforts.
 They come to God by faith—it's the result of TRUSTING HIM.
 So it is for us.

We will never win spiritual battles by OUR efforts.

We become acceptable to God

by trusting Christ and His death on the cross for us.

Once we have trusted Him and received His gift of eternal life,
 we fight spiritual battles the same way.

God's Spirit gives us the ability to win spiritual battles.

It's NEVER the result of OUR EFFORTS!

Desperation and urgency keep Nehemiah on knees.

Woman came to a friend: "You're so LUCKY to have come
 through your trials with such joy and victory." She explained:

1 out of 500,000 families lost a son in VietNam

1 out of 800 families has a child killed by a drunken driver

Doesn't LOOK lucky!

1 out of 40 middle-aged women develops adult-onset diabetes

I chose to look at what seems good, rather than

anticipate gruesome complications that can happen...

We all face pain but *misery is optional!*

How will WE react to the pain we face? The CHOICE is ours!

What lessons can we learn about facing opposition?

What difference should Nehemiah's example make in our life?