

“Immovable”

Nehemiah 4:1-6, 21-23

Week of October 8, 2023

Opening Question:

- Have you ever faced push-back or outright opposition to a plan or project? What was that like? How did you respond?
- What are some enduring images of “rubble” (physical or metaphorical) that you will always carry with you?

Pray this prayer (one person or the whole group together):

Lord, as we come together to study your Word, we bring all of who we are with our needs, our hopes and our expectations. Meet us here in the power and presence of your Holy Spirit. Give us insight and understanding as we listen carefully for your voice. And then give us courage and conviction to align our lives with the way of Jesus. We pray in his name. Amen.

Read aloud this introduction:

We know what rubble looks like. We’ve all seen piles of rubble we’d rather forget. Just think what it must have been like, then, for the people of Jerusalem. The destruction of the city walls and many structures within those walls didn’t come suddenly. It came after a year-long siege at the hands by the army of the Babylonian Empire. When they left, everything was in ruins. Some personal rebuilding took place here and there, but most of the city and the Jewish temple and walls remained rubble for 70 years! That’s a long time to look at broken stone and burned gates day after day.

Archaeological evidence seems to indicate the walls were about 16 to 22 feet thick and up to 25 feet high and about 2.5 miles in length. We can imagine how the once-rock-solid walls must have looked when battered and pulled apart and burned, what it would have been like for residents of the city and of surrounding towns to walk past and through the rubble year after year, for 70 years.

The need of the Jews in Jerusalem is what gets Nehemiah’s heart and mind moving with how he might be a catalyst to restore the city, restore the people and restore faith. It all starts with a very long and very deep pile of rubble.

Last week we looked at how fully everyone set to work to rebuild. It was inspiring to see how the people, from all walks of life, all ages, women and men alike, fully invest in a work that captivates them and promises to bring a great new start for them all.

But not everyone is happy with the progress. Opposition is rising and will test the people’s resolve and challenge their hopes of a better future. How will they deal with this? Will they give up or find a way to keep going?

Read Nehemiah 4:1-23 aloud.

Questions for Exploration:

- How would you characterize the opposition? What do you notice about their tactics?
- Jerusalem was surrounded by opposition - Sanballat to the north, Tobiah to the east, the Arabs to the south, and Ashdod to the west. (Nehemiah 4:7) What might be their motivation in wanting Jerusalem to remain in rubble?
- What is the response of Nehemiah and the people working to rebuild?
- What plans are put into place to enable the work to continue?
- How do you see trust in God on display in the peoples’ response?

Questions for Pressing it Out:

- What do we learn from this chapter in Nehemiah about how to respond when we face opposition to what we believe is God's best?
- What practical steps did Nehemiah take that can be a model for us?
- How do we find the balance between a "moving ahead" mentality and a "guarding" mentality?
- Nehemiah 4:17 says they "did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other." Look at Ephesians 6:10-18. What further insight do you gain from these verses?
- Where do you need courage to keep going? If you were to form a prayer around these thoughts, what would it sound like?

Closing Prayer (pray together as a group or have one person lead):

Creator God, from the beginning of time, you have revealed yourself as the One who brings order out of chaos. You take what is broken and make it into something new and beautiful. Build and restore us, O Lord. Take the broken-down places of our lives and our world and build them up, not so we can hide behind walls of protection, but that from places of peace and safety, we can testify to your amazing grace and love that makes all things new.