

Last week we were in Nehemiah 3. I'll remind you that at this point Nehemiah is back in Jerusalem with the king's approval, he has surveyed the damage of the walls, he then goes to the people of Jerusalem and lets them know what the plan is.

Neh 2:17-18

- (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.

We keep seeing this theme throughout the book Nehemiah is focused on the fact that God is the rebuilding, this is not Nehemiah's idea being accomplished by his own strength but God is arranging everything and supplying the power.

Then in Chapter 3 the rebuilding process is described. There is a detailed list of all the Israelites that worked on various parts of the wall. We saw that it included various professions and types of people. They were unified in accomplishing the work of God just how we as believers should be unified in the church.

We also looked at **Malchijah** and how he went from a sin list in Ezra to the list of the rebuilders in Nehemiah and looked into the differences between forgiveness and reconciliation.

Neh 4:1-3

- (1) Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged, and he jeered at the Jews.
- (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!**"

So here comes the opposition. Sanballat and Tobiah were both upset when Nehemiah came to town and they jeered at the Jews when they started the project. As things continue to develop there, ridicule and opposition is increased.

There are a few things to notice about these insults. First is that these are public, verse 2 says they were said "in the presence of his brothers and of the army of Samaria" these are meant to embarrass the Israelites in front of the surrounding people. They also mock and say a fox who is known for being stealthy would break down what they are building.

But the most important thing to notice is Nehemiahs response to the public ridicule.

Neh 4:4-5

- (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.**

Nehemiah's immediate response is to pray. He goes to God and says God do you hear them, do you hear how they are taunting Your work. He then calls down a curses on them, and says. Let them be exiled and taken as slaves. He says do not have mercy on their sins.

As we read this and really look at how harsh Nehemiah is in response we can get a little uncomfortable. Is Nehemiah being petty taking this personal and sinning in his anger, I don't think so. The key is found at the end of verse 5.

Nehemiah's says **"for they have provoked you to anger"**

He points out that this public ridicule has made the Lord angry. These are not insults to Nehemiah and his effort these men are coming and publicly mocking the true and living God.

Nehemiah knows that if they were just making fun of him that would not have been as big of a deal but they are actually mocking God. Nehemiah is focused on God's name being protected.

This is a theme we can see throughout the OT Godly men were focused on not letting God be mocked. I am going to use two examples of this the first is David and Goliath.

1Sa 17:23-26 (David has come to bring food to his brothers)

- (23) As he talked with them, behold, the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, came up out of the ranks of the Philistines and spoke the same words as before. **And David heard him.**
- (24) All the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him and were much afraid.
- (25) And the men of Israel said, "Have you seen this man who has come up? **Surely he has come up to defy Israel.** And the king will enrich the man who kills him with great riches and will give him his daughter and make his father's house free in Israel."
- (26) And David said to the men who stood by him, "What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? **For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?"**

David hears Goliath's taunt, as everyone is running in fear. He stands there and goes why are you guys afraid of him. And I love the line in verse 26 "**For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?**" Why are you letting this heathen mock and ridicule the army of the one and true living God how dare we let Him question God's strength?

At this time when nations battled it was seen as a battle of deities, the winning nation was seen as having the more powerful god. Thus Goliath's taunts were not only aimed at Israel but He was questioning the strength of the God of Israel. David says how dare we let God be mocked.

1Sa 17:45-47

- (45) Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, **but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts**, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.
- (46) This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, **that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel,**
- (47) **and that all this assembly may know that the LORD saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hand."**

David says I come to you in God's name and He will give me victory today for two reasons. The first is that all the earth may know the true all powerful God is in Israel. Secondly so Israel learns that victory is not in military might, victory is not in our own strength but in whom our God is. David was focused first and foremost in defending the name of God.

Our next example of this is with King Hezekiah when he is being taunted by the king of Assyria.

2Ki 19:10-13

- (10) "Thus shall you speak to Hezekiah king of Judah: '**Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you** by promising that Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.
- (11) Behold, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, devoting them to destruction. **And shall you be delivered?**
- (12) **Have the gods of the nations delivered them**, the nations that my fathers destroyed, Gozan, Haran, Rezeph, and the people of Eden who were in Telassar?
- (13) Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the king of the city of Sepharvaim, the king of Hena, or the king of Ivah?'"

Sennacherib comes in and says do not let your God deceive you look at all these other lands we have conquered, we overpowered their gods why would yours be any different? But Hezekiah's response is perfect.

2Ki 19:14-19

(14) Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it; **and Hezekiah went up to the house of the LORD and spread it before the LORD.**

He doesn't take these insults personally he takes the letter and goes straight to God

(15) And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD and said: "O LORD, the God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, **you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth.**

You are the true powerful God

(16) Incline your ear, O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD, and see; **and hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the living God.**

This letter mocks God he basically is going to God and saying can you believe what they are saying about You

(17) Truly, O LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands

(18) **and have cast their gods into the fire, for they were not gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone. Therefore they were destroyed.**

Hezekiah rightly points out the other gods have been destroyed because they weren't real and they had no power.

(19) So now, O LORD our God, save us, please, from his hand, **that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O LORD, are God alone."**

Hezekiah asks God to save Israel but notice his reasoning not that he would be a great king, but so that the world will know the true power in the living God of Israel.

This was God's reputation at that time, the nation's surrounding Israel heard stories of what had happened in Egypt or to Jericho. This is what made the exile to difficult for Israel to comprehend because it put God's reputation in question in their mind. But God knew He had to deal with their sin and would again prove to all the nations He was the real God. Listen to the nation's response when the walls are finished in Nehemiah.

Neh 6:15-16

(15) So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days.

(16) And when all our enemies heard of it, **all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem, for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.**

Nehemiah, David, and Hezekiah all knew that God reputation is more important and His truth being shown for what it is was more important than their own positions of leadership or defending their own name.

We need to make sure that we have the same heart when it comes to defending Christianity. I worry as I teach the youth apologetics (a defense of the faith) or even our worldview study that they would start trying to win the argument and be right instead of trying to see God be glorified and His name defended.

This is what Adam observed when he saw God's not dead in the theaters no one cheered when the professor was saved but everyone cheered in the auditorium when the professor was shown to be wrong in the debate.

God does not need us to win the argument for Him, it is His truth, our desire should be to see Him glorified. Not to try and prove He is right, He can do that on His own.

Nehemiah did not rebuild the wall because of his leadership abilities
David did not defeat Goliath because He was that great of a warrior
Hezekiah did not win the battle with the Assyrians by his might (an angel of the Lord went out and killed 185,000 men)

These were not accomplished by men's strength but by being willing to let God use them, and let God defend his own honor.

1Pe 3:13-15

- (13) Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?
- (14) But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled,
- (15) but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, **always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,**

A few things to notice, first note who initiates the conversation. WE should be able to communicate our faith the reason for our hope, when we are asked. The picture is that our lives are so different our responses to things so unique that people are coming to us and asking us about our hope.

But also notice the heart in which it is done, with gentleness and respect. This is loving the person who is talking to you and caring for their sole and wanting to see them come to an understanding of who God is, not to be right in the argument but for that person's eternal destiny.

I am not saying there aren't times we initiate the conversation, Paul did plenty, but the heart each time is trying to show the person truth not winning.

2Co 10:3-5

- (3) For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh.
- (4) **For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.**

Paul is making sure we know that we should not be interacting with the World according to the world's methods. Paul says we have access to weapons that have divine power in them, the truth! So why do we use the methods of the world to dress it up let the truth do the work let it be the divine weapon that is able to overpower strongholds in people's minds.

- (5) We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,

The truth is powerful and able to stand against all lies. When Nehemiah was faced with opposition when He was confronted with lies, he prayed and went to God, and asked God to have His truth triumph.

There are times when this would mean presenting the truth to these opponets and there are times when it would mean not responding and leaving it into God's hands. This is what Nehemiah does.

There is a proverb that summarizes the hard line between when to respond to falsehood and when not to dignify it with a response.

Pro 26:4-5

- (4) Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself.
- (5) Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.

It all is about the context and what God is calling you to do in that moment, there are times to respond and times not to, it takes wisdom to know if we should apply Proverbs 26:4 or Proverbs 26:5.

Nehemiah presents these lies in front of God and continues in the work.

Neh 4:6-9

- (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.

God is in the building and is giving it success.

- (7) 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.

These enemies are looking for any way possible to stop the rebuilding effort. Their new plan is to plan a surprise attack. They want to attack Jerusalem while their defenses are weak and while the wall is not finished.

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

Again here is Nehemiah taking time to pray in the middle of a stressful situation. This is after spending months in prayer before he even reaches Jerusalem and after just spending time praying about the opponents.

We need to be persistent in our prayers.

Luk 11:5-13

- (5) And he said to them, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves,
- (6) for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him';
- (7) and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything'?
- (8) I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his **impudence** he will rise and give him whatever he needs.

NLT- But I tell you this—though he won't do it for friendship's sake, **if you keep knocking long enough, he will get up and give you whatever you need because of your shameless persistence.**

I find this passage fascinating, Jesus says you don't respond to your friend because they are your friend because of your love, but because they are so persistent in asking you eventually give in and say stop annoying me.

Luk 11:9-13

- (9) And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.
- (10) For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.
- (11) What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent;
- (12) or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?
- (13) If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, **how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"**

Christ makes it clear at the end of this passage. If this principal is true even in sinners, imagine how the perfect God will respond to us, When we pray He is not going to trick us and gives us horrible things he will give us the best, and in verse 13 it is clear one of the greatest gifts the Holy Spirit to guide us.

Luk 18:1-8

- (1) And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.
- (2) He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man.
- (3) And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.'
- (4) For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man,
- (5) **yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'**"
- (6) And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says.
- (7) **And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?**
- (8) I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

Keep praying keep seeking for God to work, He loves us and is far greater than this unjust judge. One caveat I want to give is we need to trust in His answers when He gives them.

2Co 12:7-9

- (7) So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.
- (8) Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.
- (9) But he said to me, "**My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.**" Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Jas 5:13-18

- (13) Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.
- (14) Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.
- (15) And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.
- (16) Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.
- (17) Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth.
- (18) Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.

1Th 5:17

(17) pray without ceasing,

Neh 4:10-23

(10) In Judah it was said, "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."

(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."

(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."

2Ti 2:8-9

(8) Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel,

(9) for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound!

Neh 4:10-23

(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.**"

Psa 118:6-9

(6) The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?

(7) The LORD is on my side as my helper; I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.

(8) It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man.

(9) It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes.

Psa 146:3-6

- (3) Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.
- (4) When his breath departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish.
- (5) Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God,
- (6) who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever;

Neh 4:10-23

- (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.