

## Remember the Lord and Fight

*It could be* that I decided to do this whole series based on one of my favorite verses in the Old Testament... from which the title of today's message is derived. But before we get to that *favorite verse* of mine, let's set the scene.



The People of God were returning from Exile, in stages, back to the Land God promised, with the center of worship and government in Jerusalem.

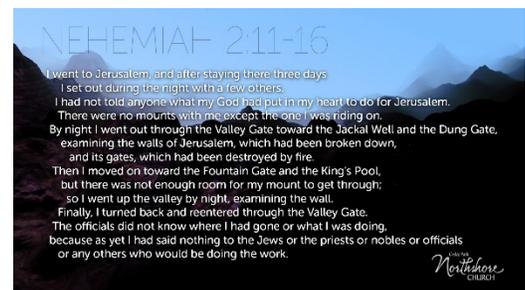
This is the People and Land promised by God to Abraham. This is the People led by Moses to this Land. This is the People governed by King David, and then his son King Solomon. And this is the People who disregarded all of God's provision and direction and rebelled. These are the People who choose other Gods. These are the People to whom God promised that they would lose everything if they persisted in their rebellion. And these are the People who did lose everything... carried off to Babylon in exile by Nebuchadnezzar.

After a few generations passed, and Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians fell to the Persians... King Cyrus of the Persians allowed some to return to Jerusalem to reestablish worship of Yahweh, in Jerusalem, with an altar and a temple. That is where the Book of Ezra starts; Zerubbabel led the first wave of exiles back to Jerusalem. And he did reestablish worship in Jerusalem and he led the work to rebuild the Temple.

Nehemiah was in the *second wave*, a few generations past the first; he was likely not even yet born when Zerubbabel led the first wave of exiles. Last week we studied the first chapter-and-a-half of the Book of Nehemiah, seeing how Nehemiah was moved by the news that Jerusalem, the People, and the Temple were vulnerable because the City's walls and gates remained in ruin. Nehemiah secured the permission of Artaxerxes, King of the Persian Empire, and went to Jerusalem.

That is where we pick up with verse 11 of the second chapter of Nehemiah where he says:

<sup>11</sup> I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days <sup>12</sup> I set out during the night with a few others. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on.



Nehemiah approached his work as one might expect, given Nehemiah's role and experience; he approached his work with his *administrative* gifts, as an **executive leader**.

There are all sorts of *personality tests*. I'm in favor of the more formal ones as they are a handy way to help teams work together. I like the Myers-Briggs; I'm an ENTJ. There are lots of these kinds of tests, including the *less formal*... the sort of thing we might see on Facebook. You know... the ones that determine what kind of *dog* you are, or which one of the *Seven Dwarves* best matches your personality (I might be a *Grumpy*). Perhaps I should come up with a test that matches personalities with the major figures in Ezra-Nehemiah.

- Zerubbabel – The pioneering builder
- Ezra – The academic man of faith
- Haggai – The straight-shooting, indignant one
- Zechariah – The Pentecostal
- Nehemiah – The executive

While I'm aspiring to be more of an Ezra and Zechariah, I most closely identify with Nehemiah. My education and experience are mostly in the areas of administration; I've had some success along those lines. I suppose that has something to do with Nehemiah being one of my favorite people in the Bible.

It turns out that there are those who have applied some of these personality tests to major figures in the Bible. If you trust the Internet, Nehemiah is an ENTJ (just like me).

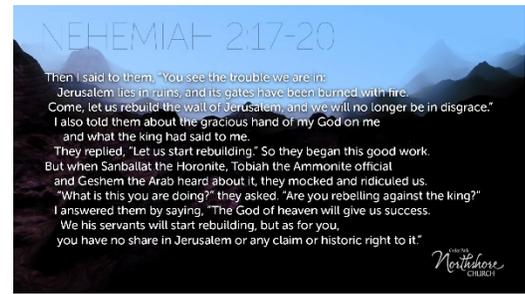
So... as one would expect from an administrative leader, Nehemiah started by getting a *lay of the land*. Before he sat to hear what others thought and saw, he got a first-hand look at the situation.

I suppose he found pretty much what he expected. The City wasn't much of a city at all because there was no security. Raiders could attack at will because the walls and gates were in shambles.

Nehemiah also found two important factors that would shape the work ahead. First, Nehemiah found the **support** of the People.

<sup>17</sup> Then I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.” <sup>18</sup> I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me.

They replied, “Let us start rebuilding.” So they began this good work.



Who determines whether someone is a **leader** or not?

Does the leader determine if they are leader? There is a lot of science to it. We can study leadership, discipline ourselves to be ready for leadership, step up when there is opportunity for leadership, and such.

We might say that God determines who leads what... that would be hard to argue against. We know that God does raise people up for leadership. The Bible teaches that God sets leaders in place... even unrighteous leaders whom he uses to accomplish His purposes.

But it seems that the best evidence that someone is a leader is that there are **followers**. Nehemiah was called and empowered by God, he had skills and resources (including the permission of the Persian Emperor), and while they did not elect Nehemiah, the People rallied behind him, recognizing his leadership.

So the first thing Nehemiah found was **support**... and the second thing he found was **opposition**. These were governors of neighboring areas; these were the ones who most likely benefited by Jerusalem's weakness and vulnerabilities. About them Nehemiah said:

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

<sup>20</sup> I answered them by saying, "The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it." <sup>1</sup>

The opposition was no surprise... it was precisely *the expectation of opposition* that motivated Nehemiah to want to secure the City in the first place.

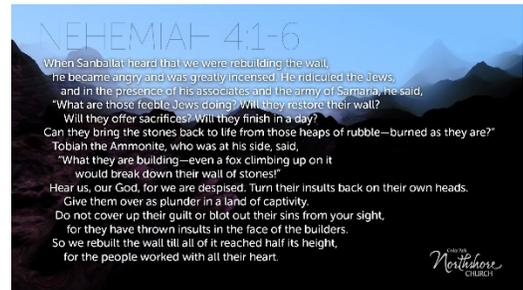
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<sup>1</sup> *The New International Version*. (2011). (Ne 2:19–20). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

In chapter 3 we see how the work commenced. Nehemiah divided up the work and delegated responsibilities by families. It was an organized plan, the sort of thing one might expect from a capable executive. If you have a Bible open, you can see the detailed list of responsibilities for each section... but then there is chapter 4.



When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews,<sup>2</sup> 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?”



<sup>3</sup>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!”

It is merely rhetoric... but when the one making the threats can back them up, one should take them seriously.

“Will they restore their wall... Will they finish in a day?”

I wonder if they might have had *Jericho* in mind (perhaps they knew the song). It would have been legendary in that region, even though the walls of Jericho came down centuries before. I would imagine that these leaders, as sophisticated and self-confident as they were, probably thought of those stories as mere fables.

But Nehemiah would not have. He knew that the God who took down the walls of Jericho in a miraculous moment was on their side. Even though it appeared that God would accomplish his purpose through the labor of the People, Nehemiah was confident in the Lord. So he turned to the Lord:

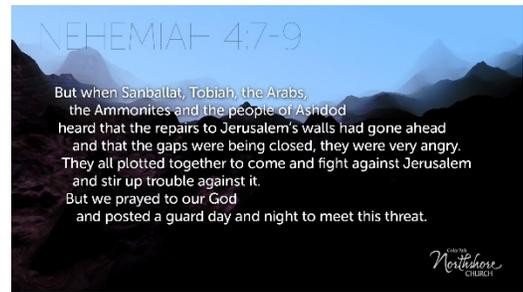
<sup>4</sup>Hear us, our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. <sup>5</sup>Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from your sight, for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders. <sup>2</sup>

And that is how things continued. The work continued. The threats continued. And the prayer continued.

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<sup>2</sup> *The New International Version*. (2011). (Ne 4:4–5). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

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. <sup>8</sup> They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it. <sup>9</sup> But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat. <sup>3</sup>



**They plotted to wage war, and God's people prayed, posted guards, and continued to work.**

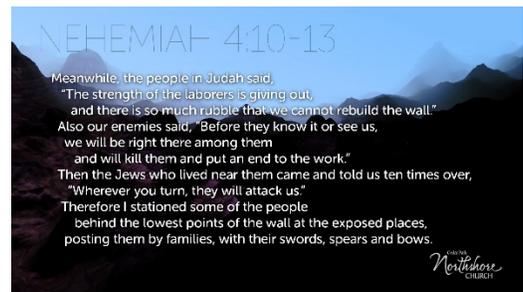
**Eventually, though, the People started to lose heart.**

<sup>10</sup> 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."

<sup>11</sup> 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."

<sup>12</sup> Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, "Wherever you turn, they will attack us."

<sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup>



**The People were not only vulnerable because of the state of their structural defenses (the walls and gates); they were vulnerable because of their own weariness. Exhaustion has a way to overtake our outlook; it is hard to have faith and vision for the future when we are not sure we can make it to the end of the day.**

**Hear how Nehemiah responded to the (reasonable) fear:**

<sup>14</sup> 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." <sup>5</sup>

**Remember the Lord and fight... a simple statement, and a powerful statement.**



<sup>3</sup> The New International Version. (2011). (Ne 4:7-9). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>4</sup> The New International Version. (2011). (Ne 4:10-13). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>5</sup> The New International Version. (2011). (Ne 4:14). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Remember the Lord... the one who promised provision and success, the one who is faithful, the one who has a record of coming through for His People. He IS great and awesome!

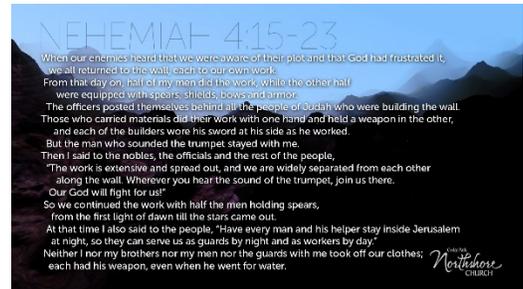
And fight... bring all we have to the work. Not merely waiting or standing by... not even punching the clock and putting in the bare minimum, but fighting. We bring our sweat and service; we even risk our very lives. And we do this not merely for ourselves, but for those around us, with us, and those who would come after us.

And that is what they did:

<sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> 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

<sup>17</sup> who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, <sup>18</sup> and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked. But the man who sounded the trumpet stayed with me.



They worked with the tools of defense in one hand and the tools of building in the other... with prayer in their hearts and I suspect praise in their mouths. It must have been quite a site.

<sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us!"

Who will do the fighting? And who was building the wall? Nehemiah said, "Our God will fight for us!" Yet they were on red-alert, DEFCON 2 on the verge of highest alert.

Were they going to fight, or was God?

Was the wall a matter of their sweat and sacrifice, or was it God's miracle?

Of course it was both. In my experience, God's best miracles are marked with the sweat and sacrifice of His people. Isn't it just like a Good Father to allow His children to be involved in the work this way?

Today's question is: What are we fighting for?  
What work are we doing worth fighting for?

God has not asked us to build walls for the City... but He has enlisted us to build a Kingdom.

This Kingdom is not a matter of bricks and gates and bolts and such. This Kingdom is a matter of people.

***Remember the Lord and fight...*** if we consider the general population, I think we just have the fight part down. Not merely that we are good at fighting, especially with one another... but that we are all about what we can do on our own, under our strength, at our own direction.

Church people, especially ones like us here this morning, on a beautiful sunny morning in Seattle with the Seahawk's home opener mere moments away... people like us probably have the ***remember-the-Lord part*** down. Right? We're here, singing, studying, sacrificing, on board with what the Lord is up to.

We may have the remember-the-Lord part down; let's not forget the fight.

Not fighting with one another, or among one another, but for one another... and more importantly, fighting for those who are not yet among us.

Think about that scene, building those walls, and securing the city. It was an all-hands-on-deck affair. The work was massive and spread out. Each one had a part to play. From those on the front lines to those on the supply chain, those armed with weapons, those skilled with building, those preparing meals, those leading... each one was enlisted.

Are you enlisted in God's Kingdom-building work? Can you lean-in a bit more? Is there something more you can do?

It may be here. There is work right here at Northshore. If you need help finding work, talk to me, or Jenni, or some other leader around here.

It could be that the work is *out there* somewhere... *out there* in the places we work and live and study and play and such.

In all of this work, whether in here at Northshore or out there in your networks, it may be something you're already good at, or it could be that it is just work that needs to be done.

In chapter three, among the list of workers and the work that needs to be done, I find something interesting in verse 8:



Uzziel son of Harhaiah, one of the goldsmiths, repaired the next section; and Hananiah, one of the perfume-makers, made repairs next to that. They restored Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall.<sup>6</sup>

What relevant skill does a perfume maker bring to repairing the section of the wall and gates as far as the Broad Wall?

The point is that sometimes need constitutes the call... that sometimes God's **call** to service is just simply that there is work that needs to be done. It is wonderful when people bring their skill to tasks in the church, but sometimes we just need to learn on the job.

Nehemiah has his name on the Book, and Nehemiah certainly played a vitally important role in leadership... but it certainly wasn't just Nehemiah building the wall, just as it wasn't merely God's miracle in this case... it was everyone's work. Some brought skills and resources; others simply brought their wholehearted availability.

I've observed over the years (in *other churches* of course) that some church people are pleased just to comfortably *wait around* for the work to get done. Perhaps waiting on God to build His Kingdom, if that's what God wants... wouldn't it just be wonderful if God would send a revival and build His Kingdom? Wouldn't it be great to watch that?

Or perhaps we church people would be glad to let others do the work. We have hirelings, pastors and such... they can go ahead and build God's Kingdom if that is what they want.

But that is not God's call; that is not the pattern we see in today's text. There are jobs for everyone in this Kingdom-building work.

God's best miracles are marked with the sweat and sacrifice of His people. Isn't it just like a Good Father to allow His children to be involved in the work this way?



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<sup>6</sup> *The New International Version*. (2011). (Ne 3:8). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.