

**Worth Fighting For**  
Building God's Way – part 2  
External Opposition and the Fight to Get it Done  
Nehemiah 3:1-4:23  
2/13-14/21

**Introduction**

- **We continue with our story** of a Jewish man who was working hundreds of miles away from Israel, working for a pagan king, who learned that his people were distraught and harassed and the capital city of Jerusalem was burned and torn down still after all these years. His heart broke and God put a vision in his mind to lead the rebuilding of the city. He wasn't an architect, a city planner, a mason or carpenter...he was a wine steward and assistant to the king. But his holy agitation was too much and he knew he needed to act. So he got permission from the king, surveyed the work, cast the vision, rallied his crew and now it was time to get to work...BUT
- **Rebuilding Jerusalem was difficult and dangerous work.**
  - **There was a good reason Jerusalem was destroyed.** The Jews rebelled until they were crushed by the Babylonians. Other nations didn't want them to rebuild. In fact, they would do anything in their power to stop the rebuilding of what they viewed as a hostile revolution.
  - **Doing an impossible building task wasn't enough,** Nehemiah and his team had threats and actual attacks from inside his ranks and outside his group.
  - **So, why did Nehemiah keep going?** Because he knew...

**No GREAT Work Remains UNOPPOSED**

- **A Point of Wisdom:** Things are the way they are because someone is benefitting from it either directly or indirectly. Otherwise, it would be different. So, any proposed change threatens that benefit and people don't release power or benefit easily.
  - **When Jerusalem was sacked, it's enemies cheered.** Why? Not only was it humbled. Not only did it feel like payback. But all the resources that it used to draw were redistributed to the nations around it. Additoinally, any tensions that existed were released and they didn't have to worry about Israel anymore. The last thing they wanted was for that drama to start up again.
  - **Let's make it personal** – When you change the course of your life to pursue the Lord, that sends an alarm to the three enemies of the Christian: The World, the Flesh and the Devil. They were all benefitting from the way things were. The last thing they want is for that to be upset. They will do anything in their power to stop that from happening.
  - **And that my friends is why it's so challenging to spiritually grow.** It's rarely an inability to grasp the subject matter. It's rarely the lack of resources. It's rarely the lack of wanting a better spiritual life. It's the opposition both inside us and around us.

- **If we're going to build God's way we need to work THROUGH opposition, NOT Around It.**

## Lesson

- **The Crew**

- **The Chronicles of Workmen**

- Ne 3:1–32 – *“Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests, and they built the Sheep Gate. They consecrated it and set its doors. They consecrated it as far as the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Tower of Hananel. <sup>2</sup> And next to him the men of Jericho built. And next to them Zaccur the son of Imri built. <sup>3</sup> The sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate. They laid its beams and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars. <sup>4</sup> And next to them Meremoth the son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz repaired. And next to them Meshullam the son of Berechiah, son of Meshezabel repaired. And next to them Zadok the son of Baana repaired. <sup>5</sup> And next to them the Tekoites repaired, but their nobles would not stoop to serve their Lord. <sup>6</sup> Joiada the son of Paseah and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah repaired the Gate of Yeshanah. They laid its beams and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars. <sup>7</sup> And next to them repaired Melatiah the Gibeonite and Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon and of Mizpah, the seat of the governor of the province Beyond the River. <sup>8</sup> Next to them Uzziel the son of Harhaiah, goldsmiths, repaired. Next to him Hananiah, one of the perfumers, repaired, and they restored Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall. <sup>9</sup> Next to them Rephaiah the son of Hur, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, repaired. <sup>10</sup> Next to them Jedaiah the son of Harumaph repaired opposite his house. And next to him Hattush the son of Hashabneiah repaired. <sup>11</sup> Malchijah the son of Harim and Hasshub the son of Pahath-moab repaired another section and the Tower of the Ovens. <sup>12</sup> Next to him Shallum the son of Hallohesh, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, repaired, he and his daughters. <sup>13</sup> Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the Valley Gate. They rebuilt it and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars, and repaired a thousand cubits of the wall, as far as the Dung Gate. <sup>14</sup> Malchijah the son of Rechab, ruler of the district of Beth-haccherem, repaired the Dung Gate. He rebuilt it and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars. <sup>15</sup> And Shallum the son of Col-hozeh, ruler of the district of Mizpah, repaired the Fountain Gate. He rebuilt it and covered it and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars. And he built the wall of the Pool of Shelah of the king's garden, as far as the stairs that go down from the city of David. <sup>16</sup> After him Nehemiah the son of Azbuk, ruler of half the district of Beth-zur, repaired to a point opposite the tombs of David, as far as the artificial pool, and as far as the house of the mighty men. <sup>17</sup> After him the Levites repaired: Rehum the son of Bani. Next to him Hashabiah, ruler of half the district of Keilah, repaired for his district. <sup>18</sup> After him their brothers repaired: Bavvai the son of Henadad, ruler of half the district of Keilah. <sup>19</sup> Next to him Ezer the son of Jeshua, ruler of Mizpah, repaired another section opposite the ascent to the armory at the buttress. <sup>20</sup> After him Baruch the son of Zabbai repaired another section from the buttress to the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest. <sup>21</sup> After him Meremoth the son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz repaired another section from the door of the house of Eliashib to the end of the*

house of Eliashib. <sup>22</sup> After him the priests, the men of the surrounding area, repaired. <sup>23</sup> After them Benjamin and Hasshub repaired opposite their house. After them Azariah the son of Maaseiah, son of Ananiah repaired beside his own house. <sup>24</sup> After him Binnui the son of Henadad repaired another section, from the house of Azariah to the buttress and to the corner. <sup>25</sup> Palal the son of Uzai repaired opposite the buttress and the tower projecting from the upper house of the king at the court of the guard. After him Pedaiah the son of Parosh <sup>26</sup> and the temple servants living on Ophel repaired to a point opposite the Water Gate on the east and the projecting tower. <sup>27</sup> After him the Tekoites repaired another section opposite the great projecting tower as far as the wall of Ophel. <sup>28</sup> Above the Horse Gate the priests repaired, each one opposite his own house. <sup>29</sup> After them Zadok the son of Immer repaired opposite his own house. After him Shemaiah the son of Shecaniah, the keeper of the East Gate, repaired. <sup>30</sup> After him Hananiah the son of Shelemiah and Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph repaired another section. After him Meshullam the son of Berechiah repaired opposite his chamber. <sup>31</sup> After him Malchijah, one of the goldsmiths, repaired as far as the house of the temple servants and of the merchants, opposite the Muster Gate, and to the upper chamber of the corner. <sup>32</sup> And between the upper chamber of the corner and the Sheep Gate the goldsmiths and the merchants repaired.”

- **Chapter 3 lists the primary notable workers** - lists are important to Jews for history, credit and retelling the stories.
- **Four things to note about the list:** I won't make ya read the chapter of names, but I do want to highlight four things before we move on...
  - **1.) The Big Dogs Went to Work (v.1)** – A.) **High Priest** - The high priest got his hands dirty and got involved in the building process immediately (leading by example). B.) The Levites (temple workers) worked too. C.) The leadership who lived there worked as well (local Jewish rulers in the region – heads of families)
  - **2.) Some Did Not (v.5)** - look at the contrast with the Tekoite Nobles in verse 5. *“Their nobles would not stoop to serve their Lord”*. **When we start thinking that we are too important to do ministry, or that our personal projects are more important than God’s projects, we have ceased to be useful to the kingdom of God and lost our way.**
  - **3.) The Ladies Jumped In (v. 12)** – Notice in verse 12 it says that a man worked with his daughters. That was so notable that they wrote it down. Women didn't normally do manual labor of this sort (they did plenty of physical work otherwise) or side by side with men. But these ladies did. They rolled up their sleeves and earned a right with the men, and the smart men knew they needed the help. **Large Important projects need everyone involved.**
  - **4.) They all built TOGETHER, side by side.** No massive Kingdom building project will be done by one man or one woman. It will not be done by one church on one side of town. It will require the unity of the churches of King

Jesus to drop their agendas and partner together to build what God really wants, a Kingdom-Rich-Region.

- **Tongues of Fire**

- **Opposition Hurls Insults to Dishearten the Workers**

- *Ne 4:1-3 – “Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged, and he jeered at the Jews. <sup>2</sup> 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?” <sup>3</sup> 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!””*

- **Sanballat and Tobiah are bullies** – they demean the Jews working and the work they are doing as useless and it’ll never last.
  - **Do words matter?** – words create realities. Of course, they matter. Most of our mindset and worldview is created by words.
  - **Reacting to Criticism:** When their words trigger our insecurities. One of the most difficult things about criticism is that it pings on our own doubts. We already have questions whether we are doing the right thing, doing the process right, are the right people, etc. So, when people criticize us, there’s a part of us that agrees with them and that makes it all the more stinging.
    - **Invalidating Criticism** – The other day at a conference I was a part of at Thrive Leadership, I heard Ray Johnston cite a popular quote that is so powerful: *“don’t receive criticism from people you wouldn’t seek wisdom from.”*
  - **How bullies work** – Bullies are bullies because they have to be. If they had true power, they would do what they wanted by force. They don’t have the power, so they have to create the power. They don’t have control, so they have to exert control. They work primarily off intimidation. They need to get you to believe that they have more power and control than they really have. That’s the only way it works. If they actually had it, they wouldn’t be bullies, they would just crush you and make it the way they wanted it. So, bullies are mind manipulators.
    - **The Shocking Truth** – the shocking truth is that bullies don’t have as much power as you think they have and the minute you realize that you can turn the tables on them. They desperately need you to buy into their fake story they are selling. If you don’t, it falls apart.
      - **A Bug’s Life Animated Film Example** – [SPOILER ALERT] 1998 film by Pixar. A group of ants are forced every year to pile up food for a mean grasshopper and his band of bullies. One year, a little misfit ant knocks over the huge pile into the water. The grasshopper demands that it be replaced, which is impossible. The little ant goes on a journey to find ‘warriors’ to help the ants defend themselves, but

ultimately his project fails. As the grasshopper gang is threatening to kill the ants, the little misfit, named Flik, stands up to them and then another ant stands and then more. They finally realized what the grasshoppers knew all along. They could beat up a few, but if the ants stood together, they far outnumbered them. The grasshoppers had always lived as bullies keeping the ants believing they were overpowered, when in fact they weren't.

- **The enemies of Christians: World, Flesh, Devil – NOT other people.**
  - **World = secular systems** that are designed without God in mind and thereby are harmful to Christianity. Example: materialism, humanism, autonomy, Darwinian Evolution, False religions, etc.
  - **Flesh = All the parts of us inside** that don't want to follow God and do what is right. These are aspects like: selfishness, greed, lust, hatred, envy, etc.
  - **Devil = a personal evil supernatural individual** who leads a group of supernatural individuals that are contrary to God and while leading rebellion against God they want to hurt and distort what He loves: His creation (primarily us).
  - **What is spiritual warfare?** – spiritual warfare is when forces are against us that we cannot see. Whether that is Satan working through systems, or personal attack or through other people, it's all spiritual warfare. If it has a supernatural origin, it's spiritual warfare. Let me give you some examples on the road of trying to grow spiritually:
    - **When you feel like quitting** – sometimes that's because you are emotionally tired and sometimes it's because the enemy is whispering in your ear.
    - **When you are anxious or depressed** – sometimes it's because your chemical level is off and sometimes it's because a spiritual bully is picking on you when you are weak.
    - **When you doubt** – sometimes it's because you can't put the pieces of logic together and sometimes it's because a supernatural being is telling you lies.
  - **If we're going to build God's way we need to work THROUGH opposition, NOT Around It.**
- **Clap Back**
  - **Nehemiah Prays in Defense**
    - **Ne 4:4-5** – [Nehemiah prays about the taunts] - "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. <sup>5</sup> 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 prayed about it and kept working** – What did the enemy want him to do? Stop working. What was Nehemiah making sure that the enemy didn't get

him to do: Stop working. So, if you can't stop the attack by caving in and getting the bully to go away, what do you need to do? Fight back. But how? How do you fight a spiritual enemy? Remember physical people may be doing the talking but the spirit behind a bully is usually supernatural. How do we fight spiritually? We pray.

- **Our Primary Defense: Prayer** – Prayer is talking to God. If we have access to the supernatural Almighty who runs not only the universe but every dimension and all things that exist, why wouldn't we involve Him in the process of our struggles?
  - **How to pray defensively** – Thankfully God knows how to sort the prayer mail and if we get this wrong He can make it right. But the bottom line of praying defensively is **praying against the root of the problem**. Where is the opposition coming from? What needs to change to change the opposition? Nehemiah simply prayed against his physical enemies to shut them down and embarrass them, but I think that we know more about spiritual warfare today and I think that we can pray deeper. Something was motivating Sanballat and Tobiah. A psychologist may have discovered trauma, family issues passed down, selfishness, greed, or a host of other motivators. But who really wanted the Jews to stay down and gone? Satan. So, who was the real problem? Satan. Not the people, they are symptoms. So, when we pray defensively there is nothing wrong with pray against systems and praying about situations and praying even against leaders that stand against Christianity, but if we are really going to go to the heart of the matter, we need to spiritually attack where the real resistance mastermind is: Satan. That means that we pray aggressively and boldly for the Lord to shut down the works of the enemy and turn them back on his head so that he would be embarrassed to try again [share example from my own prayer life].
  - **Remember: If we're going to build God's way we need to work THROUGH opposition, NOT Around It.**
- **Step It Up**
  - **Opposition Intensifies as the Wall Goes Up**
    - Ne 4:6-9 – "So we built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work."<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> And they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it.<sup>9</sup> And we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection against them day and night."
    - **The enemy list grows and gets more intense (threat is real)** – It was originally Sanballat (Haronite) the Samaritan and his buddy Tobiah the Ammonite. But then Geshem the Arab joined the team. Now, we have Ashdodites joining on. And these groups aren't playing around. They are plotting to come and physically attack. It's no longer just words.

- **Wall Completion: The people had a mind to work** – The wall got built...kind of...it was half the height but that's a HUGE deal. It's a whole city they are rebuilding around. Stuff was still drying and it wasn't protective yet, but it was getting done. **Why was it getting done so fast?** Two reasons: 1.) **Anointing of God**; 2.) The **determination** of the people. Notice the phrase, 'the people had a mind to work.' We can accomplish incredible things if we put our minds to it and work TOGETHER (the Tower of Babel story confirmed that by God's own mouth).
- **The Seriousness of the Threat is Tempered by the Size of the Bodyguard** – 4 enemy people groups against a band of non-warrior worker Jews isn't a fair fight. That is a serious threat and if that was all that was to be calculated, wisdom demands that they abandon the work and go back home and call it a day. Why? Because they are all going to die and it won't get done anyway. But they didn't go home. Why? Because those weren't really the odds. That wasn't the end of the story. That's not the full picture. The full picture was that God was on the side of the Jews and that changed everything.
- **What about our battles as Christians?** – Is Satan & demons against a Christian a fair fight? Nope. We would get creamed. So, why do we continue to fight and not just bow the knee to the bully? Because that's not the end of the story. That's not the big picture. That's not reality. We have God on our side and that changes everything.
  - **Greater** – 1<sup>st</sup> John tell us that because we have the indwelling Holy Spirit of God, we have victory. Why? Because the One in us (HS) is greater than the one (Satan) in the world.
    - 1 Jn 4:4–5 – *“Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”*
  - **Binding the strongman** – In Matthew 12 Jesus casts a demon out and is immediately attacked for having done it by a superior demonic power. Jesus shuts down the view by saying a kingdom has to remain united to remain a kingdom so clearly Satan's not attacking Satan. But then reveals that not only is Jesus doing it by the power of God, but that Jesus has come as the opposing king, that His victory is assured, that the Father has all power over the enemy (binding the strongman) so Jesus will be executing that power at will (plundering his house). That authority extends to us as Christ followers.
    - Mt 12:22–29 – *“Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw. <sup>23</sup>And all the people were amazed, and said, “Can this be the Son of David?” <sup>24</sup>But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.” <sup>25</sup>Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. <sup>26</sup>And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? <sup>27</sup>And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. <sup>28</sup>But if it is by the Spirit of*



*God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.  
29 Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods,  
unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his  
house."*

- **Prayed AND Set a Guard** – This is another beautiful example of how God expects us to live in the AND. We pray AND set a guard. We do spiritual warfare AND practical protection. It's not just one or the other. When things get difficult Christians tend to split into two camps: A.) Wall yourself off in fear; B.) Do nothing and trust the Lord. But that is not Biblical. God gave us both protection and a brain. We are to use wisdom to navigate this world and also the faith to believe that God can do the impossible. [don't bother getting into the COVID response here]
- **We've Been Equipped for Victory - If we're going to build God's way we need to work THROUGH opposition, NOT Around It.**
- **In-N-Out**
  - **Challenges From the Inside and the Outside**
    - *Ne 4:10-13 – "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."<sup>11</sup> And our enemies said, "They will not know or see till we come among them and kill them and stop the work."<sup>12</sup> At that time the Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said to us ten times, "You must return to us."<sup>13</sup> 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."*
    - **Inside Hits** – Judah & Jews are our team. They are the very people that Nehemiah is building for. They are not only calling it impossible, but they are adding to the fear by saying, 'you have to come home, the enemy is going to kill you.' As if it wasn't difficult enough to do this impossible work, Nehemiah's own people were sowing doubt and fear into his life. They could have been well-intentioned (truly concerned about their families who were at the wall). They could have been smart people who saw the odds and said, they needed to drop the project. But loving and smart people don't always have the vision that God has given. They may be operating ONLY in earthly wisdom and not considering the power of God. So, even the good people in your life don't always know what God is up to. We need to consider their advice but then we need to FILTER it.
    - **Outside Hits (Bully shift to Attack)** – As the Enemy intensified in their anger when things started coming together, they plotted to shut it down by force. This is where the bully was going to shift into non-bully status and actually attack and exert their real power.
    - **Nehemiah Sets up a Stronger Defense** – for this intense moment the work had to slow down and focus had to be shifted to defense. This was a literal attack coming, not just a threat, so they need to refocus their efforts on standing guard at the wall. They will resume work when things lighten a bit, but for now they are fully focused on defending the wall they built.





- **The Balance**

- **Nehemiah Balances Defense and Forward Progress**

- *Ne 4:16-23 – “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,<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup> And each of the builders had his sword strapped at his side while he built. The man who sounded the trumpet was beside me.<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup> In the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us.”<sup>21</sup> So we labored at the work, and half of them held the spears from the break of dawn until the stars came out.<sup>22</sup> 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.”<sup>23</sup> 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.”*

- **Response? – we prayed and set a guard: The Proper Posture of Working During Opposition.** That’s the normal response when the attack is still possible and present but not full force. It’s the normal way to build when opposing forces don’t want you to do it. Work, pray and carry a big stick.

- **Spiritual Building = Advancement, Alertness & Armor**

- **Advancement** – we have to keep going forward and press through. We can’t cave because its difficult.
- **Alertness** – we don’t just get lost in the minutia. Keep your head up. Listen for the Lord and the Holy Spirit. Be watchful, but NOT Paranoid.
- **Armor** – The armor of God gives us what we need including a sword of the spirit and prayer to lob bombs at the enemy. Don’t get caught naked or undefended through cockiness. Pride comes before the fall.
- **If we’re going to build God’s way we need to work THROUGH opposition, NOT Around It.**

### Conclusion

- **Let’s Pray for the Defense of God’s People, you, right now.**