

Nehemiah 4

Brynmawr Family Church Sermon
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 30th May 2010

Intro-

- In Neh1 we looked at Nehemiah's godly response to terrible news-prayer, reliance on the promises of God and a willingness to be part of solution.
- In Neh 2 we saw the importance of building strong relationships. The need for courage to share vision, organisation skills to plan it and knowing our authority to be able to implement it.
- In Neh 3 we saw the importance of the sheep gate and how, for us, Jesus and the cross are to be central. We looked at the complete circuit of the wall and emphasised that every link is important. We saw the broad wall and noted that something built well will last for generations to come. We lastly looked at the dung gate and saw how a willingness to serve and get our hands dirty for our King is such a priviledged calling.

Read Nehemiah 4

3 unstoppable characteristics of Nehemiah and the people of Israel:

Belief to build- v1-6

- The enemy Sanballat is furious when he hears about the wall being rebuilt and immediately starts mocking. He then unites with others in mocking the Jews. Tobiah the Ammonite says 'even if a fox goes up on it he will break down their stone wall'.
- Faith is often tried and tested through mockery. It is the enemy's first level of attack to shake people's faith in what they have been called to do, and the aim is to make them give up in the early stages of a work of God. Two key areas Satan tries to mock:
 - **i)The people**
v2-'What are these feeble Jews doing?' Jesus knew what it was to suffer mockery. In the height of His ministry His enemies and also His own family thought He was mad (Mark 3:21; John 10:20). He was the King born in a stable, not a palace. His parents were too poor to afford the normal gift of a lamb to God for Mary's purification after childbirth- they could only offer two doves (cf. Lk. 2:24; Lev. 12:8). The people from his town rejected Him because He was just the son of a carpenter and didn't look like they thought the Messiah would. The mocking reached its climax in Jesus' trial and crucifixion, the ultimate mockery being the sign 'King of the Jews' above His crucifix as He hung there bleeding to death, naked wearing only a crown of thorns.
- 1Cor 1:27-28 'God has chosen the foolish things in this world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are'. Has mockery been used against you to try and make you give up? Why not respond as the Israelites did by 'having a mind to work' (v6) and being more determined than ever to do what God says. God puts His glory in earthen vessels.
There was a missionary, Tom Tipton, who went to a village in Uganda to share Christ. The only person who was willing to listen to the gospel was a leper who had lost both legs and part of one arm. The leper accepted Christ and Tipton taught him some Bible verses and a few choruses to sing. Tipton left and returned less than a month later to find the people gathered together singing those choruses as the leper led them with the stump of one arm. Asking how this happened, Tipton was told that the leper had crawled from hut to hut using the stump of that one arm and had shared the gospel with everyone in his village."If you and I will be faithful, less reliant

on ourselves and more reliant on God, and dependent on the fullness and the power of the Holy Spirit working through us, we can see fruit that will honor God. We have the treasure in an earthen vessel."

- **ii) The place**

v2 'Will they revive stones from heaps of rubbish- stones that are burned?' Jesus came from Nazareth- a place not known for anything significant. In Matthew 2:23 it says "And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene." This specific prophecy is not immediately apparent in the Old Testament, until you realise that the Hebrew root of the word 'Nazareth' is the word 'stem'. In Isaiah 11:1 "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots." The picture is of a tree trunk being cut down, and seemingly being dead, but astonishingly new life grows from it. Nazareth looked like a dead place where nothing would ever happen, but it became the home town of the most significant person in history. How do we view where we live? Do we see it through the eyes of faith or unbelief? This will affect our ability to build.

- Have to break the mentality that 'it could never happen here'- it has, and will again. The Welsh pastor who said to the visiting preacher 'It's tough here, and going to get tougher, and there will only be a few left when Jesus returns'. The opposite is true- Jesus is coming back for a wonderful bride, and where darkness is greatest in the world, the light of God's glory shines greatest on His Church (Is 60:1-2). We are sitting on a spiritual goldmine- 'there's gold in them there hills'.
- Faith is evidenced by works (James 2:17-18)- the Israelites faith that the wall could be rebuilt caused them to work hard to rebuild it. Unbelief leads to apathy and a stopping working. What do you want to see happen? What do you believe could happen? What are you doing to make it happen? Are there areas of God's work you have neglected due to unbelief? Let God re-ignite that flame of faith and make a choice to get back to His work.

Wisdom about weakness- v7-15

- Nehemiah knew that although bits of the wall were completed, some areas were only half their intended height. These were the areas vulnerable to the attack of the enemy, and so he placed guards specifically in these areas.
Building of the Great Wall of China. They built it so high that no one could get over it. And they built it so thick that no one could tunnel through it. They built this gigantic wall that still exists today. And then the people of China sat down behind the wall, feeling that their future was secure. But in the first 100 years of the existence of the Wall of China, China was invaded three different times. The enemy didn't come over because it was too high. They didn't tunnel through because it was too thick. But each time China was invaded, the enemy came through a gate left open for them. Those who guarded the gate had been bribed. And while the people of China sat comfortably behind the security and the safety of the wall, they failed to teach their children integrity and patriotism. So they sold out to the enemy. And the enemy invaded their land.
- Open doors for the enemy need to be closed off. Repentance closes the door. Accountability helps keep it closed.
- Money, sex and power are 3 common avenues that Satan loves to trip us up in. What are your weak areas? Do you know them?
- **Bring into the light.** Hidden things gain power ('he who covers his sins will not prosper'- Prov 28:13. 'Confess your sins to one another' James 5:16). E.g. -self-disclosure, me epilepsy, my friend bedwetting- problem shared is a problem halved. Preferable same sex sharing, especially if personal problem. One of reasons the Methodist revival was so powerful in people's lives was because of the 'experience meeting'. At these people would not do Bible studies, but rather just discuss their walk with the Lord, confessing sins but also discussing their experiences of God.
- **Be filled with the Spirit.** He is the Holy Spirit- enables us to be holy. Rom 7:13 says that it is by the Spirit that we put to death the deeds (sins) of the body. Live by the Spirit and you will bear the fruit of the Spirit- Gal 5. We need to be filled regularly. Walk according to how the Holy Spirit leads. Also daily prayer for

protection in the specific areas you struggle with 'lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil'.

- **Use relevant parts of God's Word.** Find out what the Bible says about what you struggle with. The Word of God is the sword of the Spirit- absorbing the Word, especially concerning areas we are vulnerable in will give something for the Spirit to bring to our minds when we are tempted- see Jesus when tempted by Satan in wilderness.
- **Live like your old sinful nature is dead.** 'Old has gone, new has come' (2Cor 5:17), 'old nature crucified with Christ' and we are now to 'consider' ourselves 'dead to sin' (Rom 6:6,11). 'Therefore put to death'- (Col 3:5) because it has happened spiritually, make it true experientially. Take off the old man and put on the new. WWJD- Carles Sheldon's book 'In His Steps' ='what would Jesus do?' became popular on wristbands in the 1990's.
- **Use your will.** Satan will deceive us into believing he can override our will, however this is not the case, and through Jesus we have all authority over him (Luk 10:19). Jesus calls us to deny ourselves (Lk 14:27). He provides a way out of every temptation (1Cor 10:13). We have been given all necessary to live a godly life (2Pet 1:3).
- **Nip things in the bud.** Temptation is not sin, but temptation when entertained leads to sin. Recognise it immediately and take drastic action immediately. Jesus spoke of 'Cutting off your hand and gauging out your eye'- i.e. Not literal, but drastic action- i.e. avoiding things that you know will lead you into temptation.

There was a cable TV station that had trouble with its electronic switching equipment, resulting in X-rated programs being fed into the homes of many subscribers who hadn't ordered it. The alarm was sounded by a scandalized customer who called a local radio station to say, "It was really awful -- we saw it for four hours."

Combined commitment v16-23

- **Everyone was doing something.** Some were on guard. Others were fighting the enemy. Some were building the wall. Some were building and fighting. Each man and his servant stayed day and night in Jerusalem to act as guards at night. There probably would have been a rota for lookout and sleeping.
- What are you doing/can you do for the Lord? Apart from Him we know we can do nothing, however, once we have Him there is much we can do. Count Zinzendorf was born in 1700 into one of the most noble families of Europe. One day he saw a painting of Jesus being crucified and underneath the words 'This I have done for you, what are you doing for me?' God spoke powerfully to him through this painting, and he decided to dedicate the rest of his life to serving Christ. He began a special 24-hour prayer meeting amongst the Moravians in a village called Hernhut on August 26, 1727. Amazingly this prayer meeting continued without ceasing for 100 years! John Wesley visited the village and called it the 'happiest place on earth!' It birthed a mission movement seeking to fulfill the great commission of Matt 28. In the 2 decades that followed, the Moravians sent out more missionaries than all the protestants and anglicans had sent out in the previous 2 centuries!
- **They were ready to rally together when called.** Because of the scale of the work they were separated by distance, but all would come together where they heard the trumpet call. There are set times we need to stop what we're doing and rally together under the same trumpet call, or the building work will suffer. The people realised that by serving each other, they were in fact serving God (our God will fight for us). Homegroups and Sundays are both important trumpet calls to the people of God in this Church. When you are not there, your skills, personality and input are missing. We are an army and we need all the warriors if we are to succeed in fulfilling our purpose here. When we serve one another, or dedicate to one another, we are in fact serving and dedicating to God. When servants are commanded in

scripture (Eph 6:5-7) to work when the eye is off them as to the Lord, not to men, how much more does that apply to His saints within His Church?

C.S.Lewis said these words concerning how Jesus expects us to commit to Him - "Christ says, 'Give me all. I don't want so much of your money and so much of your work -- I want you. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don't want to cut off a branch here and there, I want to have the whole tree down. I don't want to drill the tooth, or crown it, stop it, but to have it out. Hand over the whole natural self instead. In fact I will give you myself, my own will shall become yours.'"

Summary

- Belief to build. Wisdom about weakness. Combined commitment

Song- *We are the army of God*