

Series: Transforming the World in Which God has Placed Us

VBC

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Nehemiah 6

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“Winning the War over Fear”

All of us represent a story - a story with a destination

- Everyone ends up somewhere in this life
- Every church ends up somewhere in this life
- Some end up somewhere on purpose

They are the ones with a VISION

- A conviction God has created and recreated you for a reason
- Not to sit back and watch life go by
- But a calling God wants you to embrace
- Responding to the 10/40 window
- Helping abused children
- Giving your life to impacting the next generation

For without this effort, without a vision

- Odds are you come to the end of your life, and wonder
- Wonder what you could have done if you lived a life of focus
- Wonder if your life really mattered

Nehemiah is the story of a man with a vision to build a wall, and beyond it all, restore the soul of a city

- A vision that came out of a HOLY DISCONTENT
 - As one writer put it, “Anyone who is emotionally involved, frustrated, brokenhearted, even angry, is a candidate for a vision”
- That led to a HOLY PRAYER, for it is in this act dreams mature into a clear picture
- That led to a HOLY NERVE: for any vision takes courage
 - Courage to leave what is comfortable and familiar and predictable
 - And risk entering the unknown
- Which then demanded a HOLY CONVICTION that confronted a rather hopeless and aimless people with a HOLY IMAGINATION
- And countered resistance with a HOLY INDIGNATION
- And a HOLY TENACITY, for when Nehemiah introduced God’s vision
 - All hell broke loose

Which brings us to Nehemiah 6 (verse 1)

- The work was now at an advanced stage
- Every attempt to halt the work had failed
- The end was in sight
- All that was left were the gates
- Military threats had been to no avail
- The people of God were again becoming the community of God

But the enemy never gives up

- He simply shifts tactics, his main energies now focused on Nehemiah

Leadership is forged in the furnace

- Chapter 6 was Nehemiah's furnace
- For God does not save us from the fire—He sometimes throws us into it
- Where we will be tested to the core of our being

The enemy came from four angles, as he does with us

1) DISTRACT OUR FOCUS (verse 1)

- It might have seemed like a nice gesture, but Nehemiah saw it for what it was, A DISTRACTION
 - An intention to lure him outside the city, pull him off project, draw him into a vulnerable situation in territory that was hostile

APPLICATION - Sometimes we get distracted

- Life is full of distractions
- And visions can be lost
- The important is distracted by the urgent
- "The daily grind of life is hard on visions" - Stanley

ILLUSTRATION - doctoral students, whose vision is to enhance their abilities to be capable ministers

- But they get distracted
- Every year I get lengthy letters describing these distractions
 - Changing churches, church crises, unusual number of deaths, personal illness, dog died, added responsibilities
- Being the man of compassion I am, I often reply something like this: "Every year has its crises - finish the wall."

- I receive my inspiration from Nehemiah - STAY THE COURSE (verse 3)

- The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing
 - Some of us need to read and re-read these words every day
 - Some of us need to become increasingly "unavailable"

- I've watched some of my friends grab hold of a dream, they believe is from God
 - But the years go by
 - Only to be diverted by hobbies or acquisitions
 - That so encumber them the building of the wall gets pushed aside

- Nehemiah knew he was part of something bigger than himself, bigger than other demands
 - A God purpose that demanded a "this one thing I do"
 - A ferocious resolve, a persistence that would not get moved off task
 - We must be about that too

There is a second attack

2) QUESTION OUR MOTIVES (verses 5-7)

- Failing in their first assault, the enemies of Nehemiah threw all pretense of friendship aside, and began a campaign of spreading false rumors
 - "Unsealed" was intentional. It was a way of saying that the word was leaked to the press, posted on the internet
 - It was already common knowledge, from reliable sources

- And here is what their press was reporting:
 - Nehemiah lied about his intentions
 - This was never about helping the people
 - This was about helping himself, about personal aspirations
 - It was all about power and ego, building one's own kingdom

- It was a strategy that worked earlier against Ezra

APPLICATION - Nothing brings out critics like a vision

- When people attempt something greater than themselves, something for God, others will question motives
 - People might even accuse you of doing it for your glory, for your own purposes

ILLUSTRATION - when Graham responded to an invitation to preach in Moscow

- The press basically wrote his ego needs a ministry of this dimension; that's what this is about

- Sometimes you may be accused simply because this is what your accusers are guilty of
 - For here in the story, the reality was they were upset because they were on their own power trip
 - Assuming that the self serving ego, selfish ambitions that ruled them must be true of Nehemiah

- RESPONSE: COUNTER WITH TRUTH (verse 8)
 - Like the first attack, Nehemiah stood his ground, he would not be intimidated
 - He knew his own heart, his practices spoke for themselves
 - So his response (as ours must be) was curt. Nothing more needed to be said; he, nor any of us, are accountable to our critics
 - Our accountability belongs to God

Here is a third assault, an age old one especially designed for leaders

3) WEAKEN OUR RESOLVE (verse 9a)

- At work in all of these assaults, all the way back to chapter 2, was the intent to weaken hearts (cf 4:10-12)
 - Literally “sink our hands”
- The aim is always to get us to give up

APPLICATION - Along the way, we will be tempted at times to give up

- The wall will seem too high, the rubble too much
- Anxieties will work overtime
- There won't be enough money
- God's not in this
- It is unreality, unrealistic

RESPONSE - SEEK GOD'S STRENGTH (verse 9b)

- Why does Nehemiah pray this?
 - He was afraid, he feared at times for his life
 - He feared his strength would give out
 - He feared people would believe the slander
 - So he prayed, “make strong my hands”
- And fear turned to courage
- Karl Barth, who ministered during the days of Hitler's rule, knew much about fear, resolve, and defined courage this way:
 - “Courage is fear that has said its prayers.”
- Nehemiah was a man who said his prayers, convinced that something happens in the invisible realm that under girds and affects the visible realm

There was yet one more assault in this story, perhaps the most threatening of all. It's one we too will face in our story.

When building our wall, here's what the enemy will aim to do...

4) COMPROMISE OUR INTEGRITY (verses 10-14)

- All of this amounted to a set up
- With the aim of tripping him up, crossing boundaries reserved for priests
- Entering into an act only fugitives were allowed to do
 - thus implicating himself, discrediting himself before the people, undermining his authority

APPLICATION - The reality, the enemy lives every day to set us up, trip us up

- Even with things, that on the surface may even seem to be of God, even seem to be safe, when it is not safe at all

RESPONSE - KNOW YOUR PARAMETERS

- Know where you belong, don't belong
 - For when we compromise, cave in, give way to sin, be it impurity, failure of faith, everything can be lost
 - Our reputation, our influence, our leadership
- But most importantly, the completion of the wall

I can't help but apply this chapter to our story

- As many of you know, we have a vision to lead the church into a new chapter
 - Defined by its connections
 - That will require a new worship center

- And one thing I am learning is this:

- The enemy works much the same way
 1. To DISTRACT, get us off message such that the vision is lost
 2. QUESTION MOTIVES, that this is about just getting bigger, the staff building their little kingdom
 3. WEAKEN OUR RESOLVE - let's just quit
 4. COMPROMISE OUR INTEGRITY

- Nehemiah's word to us:

1. Stay at it
2. Check your motives
3. Pray for strong hands
4. Watch your steps

And when you do, WALLS GET BUILT (verses 15-16)