

“REMEMBER THE LORD, AND FIGHT”

Nehemiah 4:1-23 (key verse 14)

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.”

Introduction.

In today’s passage, we will learn from Nehemiah and all the builders of the wall of Jerusalem, about how to manage all oppositions of the work of God. We are also living in times where the work of God is hindered, and strongly opposed by Satan and sin. Laws, which are against the Gospel, are passed. Even here on campus, you can be reported and questioned for preaching a homophobic or nonsensical Gospel of Jesus. Moreover, we have to contest against our sin and fear within our hearts, which cripple our hands & feet from rebuilding God’s wall. Yes, it is much easier to be afraid when we focus on these oppositions, and thus lose heart from doing the work of God. However, may we hear the words of Nehemiah, “Don’t be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight...” When we meditate upon these words, we are able, to get the wisdom to not only continue building while faced with serious oppositions, but to also carry a spear & sword ready to fight! May the great and awesome God open our hearts today, and bless His Word. Amen!

Before we start looking into the passage, here is a quick summary of the work that needed to be done on the wall. We’ve learned from the previous passages how Jerusalem was destroyed and left desolate by king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. The walls of Jerusalem were destroyed and broken down to huge piles of rubble, and even the temple was and the city gates were burned with fire. This needed a lot of effort from the all the few people to rebuild this. The situation was already bad because of the magnitude of the work. Now, things became even worse because of the oppositions of this work of God. Let us look at these oppositions.

We are told about Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite who were no strangers by now. They ridiculed the workers and orchestrated a serious threat to all the Jews who were rebuilding the wall. They were against the work of God. They were against the welfare of the Israelites. Why could they be so against the work of God? We could say many things; from their selfish ambitions threatened by the spiritual awakening of the Israelites, to the threat to their power in the regions next to Jerusalem. However, what is clear is that they hated God, and didn’t want to subject themselves to this God of Israel. So, they mocked, ridiculed and instilled fear these few Israelites. Look at verse 1 and 2. **1 When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews, 2 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?”** Sanballat mobilized his associates and army with his hatred. He called the Jews feeble, so as to encourage his people to attack them and stop the rebuilding the wall. I am sure that fear and doubt might have overcome the hearts of these workers when they learned and heard these words of Sanballat. Tobiah also weighed in the mockery, and ridicules. He continued with the insults. Look at verse 3. **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!”** Foxes are known for their speed and hunting agility, but not for their physique. They are small bodied, and skinny. Tobiah belittled the work of the Jews as so bad that even a fox climbing up would break the wall. Can you imagine the fear, shame and discouragement that would fill the hearts of the Israelites when they heard these words?

Let us see how we should respond when in the presence of these oppositions. Let's look at the faith of Nehemiah when he responded. Look at verse 4 & 5. **4 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. 5 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.** Nehemiah didn't engage in any contest against them, but rather, he immediately prayed to God, first. Nehemiah had a strong passion for God, and a sense of his identity as the nation of God. He understood and saw this despise and mockery as a direct insult to God. So, he prayed to God so that God can fight for him and his workers. Without God, Nehemiah knew that they have lost the fight. However, with God, Nehemiah was more than certain that God will help them overcome this threat. This is why he earnestly prayed. May we all learn from Nehemiah's faith and always be prayerful at all times, especially when the work of God in us is seemingly compromised. Amen!

With this prayer, Nehemiah was able to overcome this first attack. The entire host of the builders were also edified and encouraged to work all the harder, with heart. Look at verse 6. **6 So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart.** This is the power of prayer; not necessarily that we get what we asked for, but rather that our hearts are touched by God, so as to change our thoughts, our speech, and most importantly our conduct. Before prayer, we might be filled with doubt, however, after prayer to the awesome and great God, we are filled with assurance and faith. *'Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks'*. Before prayer, we might be speaking negative and fatalistic words, but after prayer, our hearts are so much filled with the word of God, removing all impurities in our thoughts, and thus glorify God with our speech. Without prayer, we might easily work sluggishly, however, after prayer we work with determination and confidence - in line with the will of God. What shall we say then? Are you filled with doubt? Invest time, and pray to the great Lord. Are you not happy with what is what is in your thoughts? Commit yourself to pray to the awesome Lord. Are you not happy about your conduct? Do you want to work better, study better, repent better? Pray Nehemiah's prayer; to the great and awesome Lord. We are all sons and daughters of God. Therefore with this identity in mind, we should overcome all oppositions of the work of God in our lives through prayer! I pray that God raise all of us as a generation of prayerful ministry. Amen!

Let us see how the enemy responded to all these. Look at verse 7 & 8. **7 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. 8 They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it.** Some would have thought that the enemy would be defeated and retract. But the opposition became stiffer all the more; it was very angry and plotted to increase the attack and fight Jerusalem. I am learning that we should always expect the enemy to not easily give up, and thus pray all the more, and be prepared to fight all them more. How should we fight? Let us all read verse 9 together. **9 But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.** Nothing changed, it was still by prayer to God that the builders stood against this attack, and thus also enabling them to actively be ready to fight, as they continued to work. Do you perhaps have an idea as how they prayed to God? Anyone? *"Ohh great and awesome God, hear us ohh Lord. Fight for us against this threat!"* Indeed, we pray, that may God bless us to be devoted to prayer, and ignite our prayer lives. Amen!

Unfortunately, the enemy's attacks got to the hearts of most of the builders, and they were running out of fuel to work. Look at verse 10. **10 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."** Their human strength could only push them to a certain limit. They needed

something else to give them strength. There was so much fear and the work of rebuilding the wall was also beginning to lag behind. It is quite interesting that by now, there hasn't been any physical attack nor combat. The builders of the wall heard the words and plans of the enemy, and again, fell into a trap of despair, without strength to continue with the work of God. Look at verse 11 to 12. **11 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."** **12 Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, "Wherever you turn, they will attack us."** Indeed, when the people of Israel focused on the enemy, it terrified and crippled them with unbelief. I believe we can relate, and understand how these people felt.

However, Nehemiah was different. We can all learn from him. He was not ignorant of the renewed threats of the enemy, but considered them wisely. The difference between Nehemiah and the people of Israel is how they interpreted the enemy's threats. To the people of Israel, the enemy's threats meant defeat for them, but to Nehemiah's who prays to the great and awesome God, the enemy's threats and attacks were nothing because God would fight and win for him and His people. Look at verse **13 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.** Because of his confidence in God, Nehemiah couldn't stay down in defeat, but got himself and the people ready to fight, because indeed, victory is theirs in the name of the Lord God.

Moreover, this is the key to Nehemiah's faith, and I pray that we all learn and accept it so that we can fight and defeat all oppositions of the work of God. Let us all read the key verse 14 together in one voice. **14 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."** Nehemiah looked things over and carefully considered how to best help the weakened labourers. And this was it; to not be afraid of the enemy, but to remember the Lord who is great and awesome. They were afraid because they focused on the enemy. There is something interesting about focusing – you cannot focus on more than one object. Focus demands being fully fixated on one thing. So then, it is a matter of where we put our focus on. Many of us focus on the wrong things. If you are told that the next test will be based on chapter 7, do you go and rather study chapter 6? No! So then, Nehemiah appealed with his people to not focus on the enemy but rather focus on the Lord who is great and awesome. **"Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome..."** he said. To remember the great and awesome Lord is very much intentional. This entails meditating upon the great and awesome deeds of God. I am sure stories were told about the Lord God how He fought for His people in the past; how He split the sea and let Israel walk on dry ground with a wall of waters on each side, on dry ground. God delivered their forefathers from the land of slavery in Egypt, with His mighty hand and awesome power. Indeed, the Lord God, the creator of the heavens and earth, is great! Today, we have the word of God to help us remember and meditate on the Lord God who is great.

I have seen His greatness. I can testify about the awesome power of God. Just over 2000 years ago, God defeated our biggest enemies; sin and death, when He gave His one and only Son Jesus to the cross to die for our sins. On the third day, Jesus was raised with power from the dead defeating both death and sin. So then, if God saved us from sin; our biggest and fiercest enemy, what can stop us from doing His work? Nothing! Therefore, when we focus on the greatness of God, and His glory, we can rest assured to overcome any fear and opposition for the Lord God is on our side. When we focus on the might, the power of God, and His splendour, we are quickened and edified to not only fight against all opposition, but to also carry out His work with excellence. Yes, when remember the great and awesome God, we are so emboldened that we have a reason to fight. Sometimes, we are unable to fight and

easily give into the attacks of the enemy because we lack no reason/purpose to fight. However, when we remember and personally encounter this great and magnificent God, we are encouraged to fight and protect our spiritual identity and legacy. Therefore, let us all remember the Lord God who is great and awesome, and therefore fight! Amen!

What were the results of remembering the Lord who is great and awesome? The builders worked all the harder. They were given new strength from God, to support their fading human strength. Even the enemy knew that they have lost. Look at verse 15. **15 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.** The work of God did stop, but continued, to the shame of the enemy. It is also quite interesting to note how Nehemiah fought with both prayer and sword, while still working. The work never stopped, but continued regardless. It becomes easy to just pray only and remember the Lord. But the work of God must still continue, and practically be ready to fight and attack. Let us see how Nehemiah and his men worked. Look at verse 16 to 18. **16 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 17 who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, 18 and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked. But the man who sounded the trumpet stayed with me.** Please do pay a specific attention to the builders. Having remembered the great and awesome God in prayer, they were working with building equipment and weapons (swords and spears). They carried materials with one hand and held a weapon in the other. Each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked. This teaches us to be proactive and wise when we do the work of God. We continue to see how Nehemiah was proactive and practical as he developed a strategy working, and most importantly being ready to fight. Look at verse 19 to 20. **19 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. 20 Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us!"** Yes, we do the work of God, yet at the same time, have the necessary weapons to fight against the enemy. Nehemiah's weapons were not limited to spears and swords, but used every single resource as a weapon; every dedicated man and even their respective helpers formed part of the army ready to fight. Look at verse 21 to 23. **21 So we continued the work with half the men holding spears, from the first light of dawn till the stars came out. 22 At that time I also said to the people, "Have every man and his helper stay inside Jerusalem at night, so they can serve us as guards by night and as workers by day." 23 Neither I nor my brothers nor my men nor the guards with me took off our clothes; each had his weapon, even when he went for water.**

Of course, we do preach a gospel of peace. We never fight or kill, but rather we there is a different kind of fight. It is spiritual, not physical. And therefore, the weapons used are also spiritual, and not physical. So then, what is our best weapon to fight and do the work of God with? It is the word of God. **For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow...** [Heb 4:12]. Yes, the word of God is the sword of the Spirit [Eph 6:17]. When Jesus was tempted by Satan who tried to stop Him from the work of salvation from sin, Jesus overcame him with the word of God. In all the attempts, Jesus responded "*it is also written...*" A foolish Christian is one who is not equipped correctly with the word of God to fight. Yes, we are all soldiers of Christ; who work by faith in the great and awesome God, and also fighting and defeating Satan with the pure word of God. May God bless our bible studies and our testimony writing ministry so that we can be equipped to fight and defeat Satan as we carry out the work of God. So then, if you do not have a weekly bible teacher, please come speak to any of our shepherds and assign you one. If you do not know how to write a bible testimony, please do speak to your bible teacher or any of our shepherds to guide you.

I thank God for this message. I have been slugging a lot on my prayer life and devotion to the word of God. I am encouraged by the prayer life of Nehemiah who always prayed to the great and awesome God. Also, I was particularly encouraged about how to be equipped with the word of God to fight as I continue with the work of God. I am called as a shepherd, and a fellowship leader of our Berean's fellowship. Of course we are people and the struggle is real. Our members have real life and spiritual issues which needs a shepherd that is both prayerful, discerning/observant and most importantly so equipped to fight. I was touched by the testimonies of brothers Forete and Melani. Through testimony sharing, I could see and understand the magnitude of the spiritual attacks. I was sad and happy at the same time – sad for what they were going through, and yet again in the end, I was so happy to hear how they both overcame all these attacks by the holding on to one word of God. Yes, there will be other issues in the future, but they have gained a sure weapon; the word of God, to always help them fight and win. Please pray for myself and shp Donald to lead well this fellowship with prayer and the word of God.

In conclusion – the work of God must continue. However, in order for it to continue, we need the weapons of prayer and the word of God to fight against the enemy. Our victor is sure in deed, and it is intertwined with remembering this great and awesome God. He has displayed His greatness and glory when He saved us from sin through Jesus Christ! So then, let us go back to the bible; let us go back and be devoted to both prayer and the bible for us to be effective and powerful soldiers of God. One word: Remember the Lord, and fight! Amen.