

NOW STRENGTHEN MY HANDS

Nehemiah 6:1-14

Key Verse 9

They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, "Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed." But I prayed, "Now strengthen my hands."

In today's passage we are going to learn from Nehemiah how to remain focused on the mission that God gave us to the very end in the midst of challenges. Through this passage we are going to witness the enemy attempting various tactics to disrupt Nehemiah and the people of Israel from finishing the wall, this time the enemy attempted various persuasive ways, however Nehemiah saw through the tactics of the enemy and prayed to God saying: *"Now strengthen my hands."* We are therefore going to learn how Nehemiah could spot their tactics. What was his secret? Also, we are going to learn about the meaning of Nehemiah's prayer saying: *"Now strengthen my hands"* and how it became the key to ensuring that Nehemiah remains focused on the mission of God to the very end.

The passage today begins with Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab and the rest of Nehemiah's enemies receiving word that Nehemiah and the people in Jerusalem had rebuild the wall with no gaps left and only left with setting up the doors on the gates. This news hit the enemies quite hard, they were terrified that the work is almost complete. Because the doors of the gates were not setup yet, they thought that is their chance, their one and only chance to disturb and destroy the work that had already be done. It was a now or never situation they thought, and so they acted quickly. How did they act? Previously they mocked and ridiculed Nehemiah and the builders in Jerusalem to discourage them, and they sent death threats. How about now, what did the enemies do to stop this work, in this very small opportunity they saw? Let us look at **verse 2**: *"Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message: "Come, let us meet together in one of the villages on the plain of Ono." But they were scheming to harm me;"*

Sanballat and Geshem used a different tactic, this time they took an approach of friendliness, they said *"Come, let us meet together in one of the villages on the plain of Ono"* This, to one may sound like an invitation to reconcile and put difference aside. The plain of Ono is said to be very close to Sanballat's home, so this could be viewed as an invitation to his home to even congratulate Nehemiah on the work well done and to express their regret for opposing the work and expressing their support. However, this was not the case, the goal of the enemy had not changed, the goal of Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem and the rest of Nehemiah's enemies had not changed. Now more than ever, they wanted the work of God to not see completion. They wanted to do this by harming Nehemiah who was the leader of rebuilding the wall. But glory to God, for Nehemiah could see their evil plan through their friendliness and persuasion. This took a great deal of discernment. As Christian believers we need a spirit of discernment, because the enemy will not always come with mocking, threats, and bad things, sometimes the enemy will also come in a friendly manner, with good things yet intended to harm us. So, we need to have a spirit of discernment like Nehemiah so that we can see through the enemy's evil intentions.

How could Nehemiah see through the enemy's evil plan in this friendliness, where did he get the spirit of discernment? What was Nehemiah's secret? Let us look at **verse 3**: *"so I sent messengers to them with this reply: "I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?"* Through Nehemiah's reply we can see that the secret to his discernment was his attitude towards the mission that God gave him. To Nehemiah, fulfilling the mission of God, rebuilding the wall and finishing it was the most important thing and he did not compromise. Going to meet Sanballat and Tobiah on the plain of Ono, might have been a good idea, but because it was interfering with the work of God, Nehemiah could discern that it is not any good, but rather can only lead to harming him. Nehemiah valued the work of God, to him it was the most precious and wonderful gift from God, he said: *"I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down..."* And because of this value system, Nehemiah could discern that there is an evil element in Sanballat and Geshem's request.

In order to have the spirit of discernment like Nehemiah, we too need to have a humble and absolute attitude towards the mission that God has given us, we need to value the work of God more than everything else, see its greatness. Nehemiah said: *"I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down..."* Back in the days, the Korean missionaries always emphasized keeping Sunday Worship service without compromise, at the time I never understood it because I thought sometimes, I need to go home and visit my family, visit friends or go on holidays. But the Korean missionaries

persistently emphasized and encouraged us in this way to plant an attitude of valuing the work of God more than these, they wanted us to consider the work of God as precious, a great project that we have been privileged to participate in through the blood of Jesus Christ. They encouraged us in this way to strengthen us and grant us the ability to discern and overcome the enemy's evil tactics in things that look somewhat good.

In October, we will be having a Spring Bible conference, now the enemy will come with various tactics to stop some of us from attending the conference and experiencing the work of God. The enemy will come with good things or important things, like an assignment that is due, urgent need to visit home or many other things. Before acting, I want to urge you to consider the mission of God, the great project, the work that is due to be completed through the conference. May God be with each one of us to register and join the conference on the **14-15 October** by faith Amen.

Because the work of God was so precious to Nehemiah, he remained persistent, they tried to distract him by sending the friendly message about 4 times, and still Nehemiah's answer remained the same. He said: *"I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?"* Because Nehemiah was sure about the importance of the work of God, the great project, when the enemy put pressure on him to change his mind, he was not shaken but gave the same response. When the enemy saw that the friendly tactic was not working with Nehemiah, they went back to their old ways of threats. Let us look at **verse 5-7**:

Then, the fifth time, Sanballat sent his aide to me with the same message, and in his hand was an unsealed letter 6 in which was written: "It is reported among the nations—and Geshem says it is true—that you and the Jews are plotting to revolt, and therefore you are building the wall. Moreover, according to these reports you are about to become their king 7 and have even appointed prophets to make this proclamation about you in Jerusalem: 'There is a king in Judah!' Now this report will get back to the king; so come, let us meet together."

Here the enemy used threats to plant fear in Nehemiah's heart. Now, you will remember when Nehemiah heard about the broken-down wall and burnt down gates while in Persia, he prayed so hard to the Lord for 4 months to move the heart of the king Artaxerxes to grant him favor by allowing him to come to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall. At the time the king gave his full blessing to Nehemiah to be on his way to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall. However today, Sanballat threatened Nehemiah saying that it is reported among nations and Geshem says it is true that the Jews are plotting to revolt hence Nehemiah is rebuilding the wall, moreover they are reports that Nehemiah is to become the King of the Jews. These rumors suggested, great opposition to the king of Persia, and if we remember, Nehemiah's prayer at the beginning really showed that he wanted peace with the king, he wanted the blessing of the king in doing this work. Now with this rumors that Sanballat is bringing forth, one might think Nehemiah should go down to Sanballat to clear things. Especially because Sanballat was suggesting that he can help with this crisis. In the **NKJV verse 7b** reads as: *"There is a king in Judah!" Now these matters will be reported to the king. So come, therefore, and let us consult together.*" What Sanballat suggested seemed like a viable option, to clear Nehemiah's name, Sanballat was somewhat influential so perhaps together with Nehemiah they can do something so that these damaging rumors don't reach the king Artaxerxes.

But how did Nehemiah respond to these threats? Did he go down to Sanballat to clear his name? Let us look at **verse 8**: *"I sent him this reply: "Nothing like what you are saying is happening; you are just making it up out of your head.""* Once again, Nehemiah saw through Sanballat's lies and told him straight that there is nothing happening like he is suggesting, all this is in his head. What Sanballat brought to Nehemiah was compelling. But the spirit of discernment in Nehemiah's heart saw through the lies. Nehemiah could see through this lies because he prayed to the Lord. He had faith that the Lord had blessed this work, that the Lord had moved the heart of the king, so such rumors had no standing. Nehemiah refused to rely on his own thinking and what is happening around him, but rather he relied on prayer, the promise of God and fulfilling the work of God. So, we too as gospel workers we must pray for the mission that God has given us, and not do things by our own strength understanding, we must have faith in the promise of God and that indeed the Lord has blessed our prayers and will help us finish the work he has given us.

After Nehemiah had resisted giving in to the threats and persuasion by the enemy, the enemy still did not back down. Let us look at the **key verse 9**: *"They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, "Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed." But I prayed, "Now strengthen my hands.""* The enemy did not stop but continued his

attempts to frighten Nehemiah and the people in Jerusalem, the enemy's continued to do so thinking Nehemiah and the people in Jerusalem's hands will get weak for the work and it will not be completed. Although Nehemiah was full of faith and zeal to finish the work. We can imagine how these tactics could slowly frighten Nehemiah and the people of Israel, how it could cause them to fear for their lives. How then did Nehemiah respond to these tactics and attempts to frighten him? Especially attempts on his own life. Nehemiah's response was quite amazing, he prayed, not for his life to be spared, but for his hands to be strengthened. Nehemiah prayed that God may give him strength to finish the work. How could Nehemiah pray like this?

Nehemiah could pray in this way because he feared God, the fear of God was much stronger than the fear of his own life. Nehemiah feared God for he knew he was sovereign over all things in heaven and earth. When we fear God more than this, we will demonstrate great strength that the enemy will not be able to touch us. The enemy strength only goes up to death, that is why when Jesus Christ died on the cross for the sin of all mankind the power of the enemy was crushed. So, Nehemiah did not pray for his life to be spared because he knew that his life is in the hands of God, but rather he prayed that God may strengthen his hands. He prayed for his hands to be strengthened for he knew that that the work of God must be completed, and nothing must interfere with what God has willed to be done. When Nehemiah's eyes were focused on God, who is sovereign and all-powerful, and on the mission that God gave him, he was not frightened, he was not shaken. Nehemiah did not pray for his enemies to be destroyed or his name to be cleared, or even strength for his name to be cleared. But he prayed even more for the work of God to continue and be completed. To Nehemiah, God and fulfilling the work he has given him was all he needed, that was his refuge.

How about us today? What is our response to the enemy threats, tactics. What do we do when we are challenged by matters of life? What do we do when we are going through major financial challenges? Job losses? What do we do when we are faced with major challenges on campus, our fees, bad exam results, conflict in our families. Actually, these challenges are some of the ways that the enemy attempts to derail us from the work of God, from fulfilling the work, they are not just life challenges, but they are spiritual challenges. When Nehemiah was faced with spiritual challenges, he did not leave the work of God to try clear his name, he did not pray that his enemies may be destroyed, rather he prayed that God may strengthen his hands to stay on course and finish the work. Similarly, let us remember the Lord who is great and awesome, who sovereign over all things, and pray that he may strengthen our hands. When Nehemiah had this attitude, he was unshaken by the enemy's tactics, he could see through the lies and evil intent of Sanballat, he could see through the false prophesy of Shemaiah who was hired to give him a bad name and discredit him.

So, the solution to our life problems is not in going out there and clearing our names, going off the radar from church to sort our issues. But rather it is in knowing who God is and doing his work. When the Korean missionaries were sent across the world, including Africa, they faced many challenges, discrimination, language barriers, finances, and many other things. But when we met them, they were full of life, they were unshaken, they were full of faith, they were focused. They were like this because they feared God, and they valued the work of God more than these. May God have mercy on us today, grant us the same attitude as Nehemiah and the Korean missionaries, fear God and value his work above all things. May God have mercy on us to repent from considering the work of God as something that we can do only when we have some spare time. May God help us to priorities the work of God over all things, for it is here where our strength lies.

Conclusion

When we make a decision to follow Jesus and engage in his world salvation project, we will face lots of oppositions and challenges inwardly and outwardly, oppositions that will come as friendly gestures or clear-cut aggression. So, we must be prepared. We must pray that God may strengthen our hands to keep on working for God's great project. We must not be distracted from God's great work. May God help us to serve the great work that God entrusted us to serve by faith.