

Good evening. Tonight we're going to look at Nehemiah. Nehemiah chapter 4. Let's look at it. Let me read the scriptures. Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged. And he jeered at the Jews. 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? Tobiah, the Ammonite, was beside him and he said, yes, what are they building? If a fox goes up on it, he will break down their stone wall. Here, oh, 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. 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. So we built the wall and all the wall was joined together to half its height for the people had a mind to work. But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashtodites 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. And they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it. And we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection against them day and night. 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. And our enemy said, They will not know or see till we come among them and kill them and stop the work. At that time, the Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said to us 10 times, you must return to us. So the lowest parts of the space behind the wall in open spaces, I stationed the people by their clans with their swords, their spears, and their bows, and I looked. and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord who is great and awesome and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes. When our enemies heard, that it was known to us and that God had frustrated their plan, we all returned to the wall, each to his work. From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction and half held spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. And the leaders stood behind the whole house of Judah who were building on the wall. And 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. And each of the builders had his sword strapped at his side while he built. The man who sounded the trumpet was beside me 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. In the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us. So we labored at the work and half of them held spears from the break of dawn until the stars came out. 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. 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. What a marvelous passage from the word of our God. On this Valentine's evening, it may not be what you were anticipating, but it's what God has for us. Nehemiah and the people of God are sorely tested. And they're tested to the limits in their leadership, in their commitment, and their resolve to what God had called them to do. For we find in this passage, first of all, the taunt of the enemy. They had begun to rebuild the wall, but there were those who were opposed to them in an unrelenting and a ruthless fashion. One of the oldest tricks of enemies is verbal attack in the form of ridicule. They employed wounding sarcasm. There's no need for any factual authentication. And we find the instigators, two of the three that we met earlier in Nehemiah chapter two. And Nehemiah reveals that anger was their motivation. If the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt, trade between Jerusalem and to Samaria to the north would be more fully established and Israel would probably supplant Samaria for trading. This particularly angered Sanballat, a leader of Samaria. He paraded his army as we see in verse two. He also brought visiting statesmen to show their great valor and strength and military might and superiority. And he hurled at them a series of rhetorical questions. He gave verbal jabs to them here. For he challenged them in these words. 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 burn ones at that? And then a leader of an Amorite, Tobiah, joins in with a jab asking and saying, yes, what they are building, if a fox goes up on it, he will break down their stone wall. Even a small little fox would crush this work that they've been doing. Have you ever had the taunt of an enemy? Their ridicule, their jabs, their destructive speech to discourage you from what God has called you to do in life. Perhaps it's someone who's not a Christian. Someone seeking to make fun of you or your faith. And maybe someone in your family. But we all face the reality of opposition. Jesus taught us not to be surprised if they opposed us. They opposed him. Is not the teacher greater

than

his students? Here we are reminded of not only the reality of the taunting that came against them, but the response of Nehemiah to these charges. Does he give in to their harassment? Does he allow it to discourage

and distract him? Does he succumb to their efforts? Verse four. And five is Nehemiah's

response. Hear, O our God. He cries out in prayer to the covenant God, the God of his people. for we are despised. Turn back their taunt on their own heads and give them to be plundered in a land where they are captives. How do you respond when you face opposition, when someone seeks to discourage you? It's interesting what Nehemiah does not do. He doesn't He himself does not retaliate. He doesn't even respond to those who are opposed to him. He turns to the great and mighty God of the covenant and cries out for God's intervention. We find that Nehemiah is a man

of prayer. We've already seen this in the book of Nehemiah. Remember Nehemiah chapter one, when his brother gives him the report, the report of the condition of Jerusalem? What is Nehemiah's response?

He cries out to the Lord. And again, in chapter two, when the king wanted to know the reason why his face was so sad and fallen, His instinctive reaction was prayer. He went to the Lord. That is how he responds to his

critics. He believed that God is so able to work with people. that God called them to this work, and that God would see them through, even in the midst of the opposition that was heated against them. He knew that God would not desert them, that he would give them strength, that his covenant love was set upon his people. And God would see to it that his promises would be fulfilled to the future race and the coming Redeemer, our Savior Jesus Christ. Is not the Lord Jesus himself the man of sorrows? The one who knows about his people who are despised and rejected just as he was? Nehemiah focuses upon God's mercy, but he also beseeches the God of justice, that these antagonists may receive the just rewards for their evil and their hatred against the covenant God of heaven and earth. Now like I said earlier, this is Valentine's Day. But the God who is all loving is so perfect and pure that he, by his nature, stands against that which is not good and perfect and pure and righteous. And so, Nehemiah, in great biblical

tradition, cries out to God, that he might meet out, pour

out his wrath. The language of this prayer is very much likened to some of the prayers we find in the book of Psalms. They're imprecatory type prayers

that the wicked might be punished. We don't have the kind of time

I would like to really go into all the facets of imprecatory

prayer, but how are we to understand this prayer? Nehemiah is concerned for the

glory of God. Also, God's anger is not irrevocable. If people turn to him, if they

repent, his mercy is guaranteed. We read after he prayed that they got busy working. They worked with all their heart. What a powerful thing prayer can be in the face of those unrelenting people opposed to Christ and His church. It's been said that the history of the Bible is the outworking of Genesis 3.15 of the conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. And we find it here. We find it actually in most every book of the Bible and so many pages of the scriptures. But we know ultimately and finally that our triumphant savior is victorious. that sin will be put down and those opposed to Him for all eternity. And even the lingering sin for which we have been forgiven and in the Lord Jesus been made new, even that sin will be removed from us for all eternity. And we will see Him in glory and be like Him. We will be fully sanctified and perfected. So their initial plots fail. The taunts are not effective. So we read, starting in verse nine, of the intensity of these enemies that they begin to plot and plan together against the Jews with violence. And the Jewish people in Jerusalem are encircled. Here there's renewed emphasis on the Ashdodites who have joined. Sanballat to the north in Samaria. Tobiah and the Ammonites to the east. I'll try to do it correctly. Sanballat and Samaria to the north. Tobiah and the Ammonites to the east, the Ashdodites to the west, and the Arabs to the south. But God restrained them as He protected His people. They threatened, they rattled their sabers. It was a great potential harassment of the people of God. But look at the response of Nehemiah. He says, we prayed. And we set guard at each site or post. Here is a great truth for us. Again, we find him praying, believing and knowing that God is sovereign and works. But in addition to prayer, they are posting guards along the wall to ensure the safety, to be observant of any approaching enemy. It is a faith that impacts the way in which they live their lives. That is true saving faith that leads to works. And here they're putting on the works of the sword to protect them. We know ultimately that this warfare, that this opposition is spiritual in nature. Our ultimate enemy is not flesh and blood, but our warfare is spiritual, and we will face opposition. Jesus says, woe if all men speak well of you. The apostle Paul says that it is with many tribulations that we must enter the kingdom of heaven. but it is the Lord Jesus who is that triumphant warrior. He is the one who is ultimately triumphant in the battles that we are engaged. I need to press on, there's so much more in this passage. We find that they even come to stronger threats when their initial threats were not

being effective. In verses 10 to 13, there's a general call to arms. In response to the threats, Nehemiah calls the people to put their mind on the Lord and be prepared to fight. What we have is a fighting, working force. Even those that lived outside the city were to stay within the city for safety and to help secure the city. And we read in the final verse that they remained in their clothes for working and for defending the people. They did not put on their clothes for resting or for sleeping. He appointed those to be guards, to listen and to watch for danger. And what we have here is the sword and the trowel. They continued to build the wall and do the work to which God called them to, but many of them worked with a sword at their side in case they had to put down the trowel and pick up and fully use the sword to defend themselves. But we don't find them panic stricken. This is calm and confident trust. But it is also being ready and prepared to face the enemy if they try to scale the wall. Perhaps you know of the well-known quote that's attributed to Oliver Cromwell. Put your trust in God and keep your powder dry. That is what this passage is about. Trusting the Lord and yet being prepared, being ready for action, being ready to combat the enemy. It is prayer and perspiration that is in this passage. where they commit it to the Lord and they do their work and are ready. Is it not the fear of the Lord that sets us free from the fear of men? Because they were in prayer, because they were working and serving for the Lord, for His glory. They experienced the freedom from an over-preoccupation but the fear of men that can be destructive and debilitating. We read they had shifts of those up during the night and those who were protecting up during the day. And they had commanders behind the different leaders to oversee the whole thing. But the underlying conviction is at the end of verse 20, our God will fight for us. This was their confidence that God Almighty was with them, would protect them, and deliver them from whatever they faced. They were not despondent. but they were ready. What lessons for your own Christian life come out of this passage? I'd like to just highlight a couple. This overriding theme of prayer. The Lord Jesus when he was tempted, drew upon the word of God. At significant times in his ministry, he spent time in prayer. Much like Nehemiah, though the Lord Jesus at times challenged his enemies, there were times like Nehemiah where he entrusted himself to the Father. These are some of the principles that we must remember. That as we place our focus upon the Lord, knowing who he is and what he is able to do, we can be men and women of courage. This is what's needed greatly

in our day and in Christ's church. And it only comes as we have
that glimpse, glimpse of the Lord himself. He's the only one
that can give us that strength, that resolve that we find among
these building the wall with a trowel and a sword. May God give us grace. I think
of that hymn by Edith Cherry that we sing, we rest on thee. We rest on thee our
shield and
our defender. We go not forth alone against
the foe, strong in thy strength, safe in thy keeping tender. We rest on thee, and in
thy name
we go. We go in faith, our own great
weakness feeling, and needing more each day thy grace to know. Yet from our hearts,
a song of
triumph peeling. We rest on Thee, and in Thy name
we go. Let's pray. Our Father, we seek to rest in
You, for we know Your promises are sure and certain. that you
are the great and mighty God of triumph, of love, and of power. We pray that as we
face difficulties
or encounter perhaps opposition because of you and the gospel,
we pray that we might respond in prayer in a spiritual way
that we may fight the battles to which you have called us in
your strength and in your methods and ways. We are weak. We are needy in and of
ourselves. We cast ourselves upon you. For we know that you are the
God who is great. and magnificent and almighty. And like our brothers and sisters
here in Nehemiah 4, we too long that Your glory would be made
known. And that we would not eclipse
it by our own lack of faith or trust in You. Our fear of men,
give us that burning fear of You. that so transforms our lives
that we might live for your praise and your glory. We ask for your
help. In Christ Jesus, our Savior's
name we pray. Amen.