

I. Introduction:

- A. In our first or second message in this series I hinted that we could look at Jerusalem as a picture of the Lord's church.
 - 1. I'd like to continue with that simile this afternoon.
 - 2. I'd prefer to say that my subject is "*Christianity*" or modern "*Christendom*," but this message would be more appropriate if we think along the lines of local congregations – the definition of "*church*."
 - 3. I'd *like* to say that this representation doesn't come close to *our* church, but that may not be exactly true.
- B. Let's use a simple three-point outline – condition, opposition and solution.

II. Nehemiah made a private survey of Jerusalem to discover the CONDITION of Jerusalem.

- A. How many weeks did it take this man to travel 1600 miles from Shushan to Judah?
 - 1. I'm not sure where to look for an answer. Let's just say that it was a long, tiresome journey.
 - 2. Even if the man didn't have his hands on the steering wheel himself all the way, he was exhausted.
 - 3. **Verse 11** says, "*So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days*" – probably resting and recuperating.
 - 4. And by the way, there is an interesting statement in **Ezra 8**.
 - 5. After **Ezra** described his trip to Jerusalem in more detail than Nehemiah, he says in **8:32**, "*And we came to Jerusalem and abode there three days.*"
 - 6. Were these three days just a coincidence or was it a part of general protocol for that day and age?
- B. At nightfall on the third day, Neh. saddled his beast & took a few men with him for a private survey of the city.
 - 1. He tells us he went out the burnt remains of the Valley Gate which is at the southwest corner of Jerusalem.
 - 2. If you still have that hand-out I gave you two weeks ago, you might follow along on his journey.
 - 3. He rode east along the entire southern edge of the town, passing the Dung Gate and swung north toward the Fountain Gate, but that was about as far as he was able to go.
 - 4. It wasn't more than 20% of the circumference of the city.
 - 5. He turned around and eventually reentered at the Valley Gate.
 - 6. The walls were in such a condition.... the stones pulled down and scattered around... that he couldn't make a trip around Jerusalem.
- C. Why didn't he make the trip on the inside of the wall – inside the city?
 - 1. First, because he didn't want to make a scene – create any undue excitement – cause any angst.
 - 2. And second, there were likely homes and businesses built right up against the wall making that kind of survey difficult. He wanted to see what it looked like to a foreign visitor.
- D. What did his survey reveal?
 - 1. He viewed the walls of Jerusalem, finding them broken down, and the gates thereof consumed with fire.
 - 2. He found so much rubble that there was no room for his animal to walk.
 - 3. Probably at a place or two he was only a step away from death in the valley below – Hinnom or Kidron.
 - 4. And Hinnom was the garbage dump and sewer plant of Jerusalem.
 - 5. There was nothing to keep the wind from blowing the stench of Jerusalem's sewage back into the city.
 - 6. Nehemiah found it disgusting, a reproach, a shame.
- E. He said in **verse 17** – "*Ye see the **DISTRESS** that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a **REPROACH**.*"
 - 1. He said to the rulers of the city, "*Do you see the **DISTRESS** that we are in?*"
 - 2. And do **you** see the word "*distress*?"
 - 3. It is the same word which we saw in **verse 2** – "*why is thy countenance sad?*"
 - 4. That Hebrew word is translated "*sad*" twice, and it is rendered "*distress*" only once.
 - 5. But it is "*evil*" and "*wickedness*" about 500 times.

6. "Do ye see the **EVIL** that we are in, because our city has no walls or gates?"

7. "We are a reproach and a shame before the eyes of the unbelievers. "

- F. Thinking of Jerusalem as an illustration the Lord's churches, what might this condition represent?
1. To what might we liken the walls of the city or the church?
 2. Certainly, it couldn't be **the walls of the building** in which the church meets.
 - a. In that sense these walls would be as porous as a cheap bug screen, or a chain-link fence.
- G. Someone might think of **the members** of church as the walls, but that doesn't make a good illustration, because they are the residents on the inside of the walls, not the walls themselves.
1. Nevertheless, some people think **they** are the only reason that God's enemies are not residing in the church.
 - a. They think that it is their job to police the walls and guard the gates.
 - b. They become just like the Pharisees in their diligence against evil.
 2. But if that were the case then some churches would have a hundred different standards and walls.
 3. Every man would have their own criteria for judging the worth or worthiness of enterees.
 4. And if that were the case, the walls of the city would zig and zag, lift and lag like a horrendous scar across the country-side and around the city.
- H. No, if I had to find something for the walls to illustrate, I would have to choose – the doctrines of that church.
1. There have been times in history when **doctrinal statements** were condemned as being man-made.
 2. There have been churches which refused to fellowship with other churches – not for what they believed, but for daring to publish written explanations of what they believed.
 3. Some churches have declared that spiritual people and godly churches simply believe what the Bible says and they don't need to have orderly definitions of their doctrines.
 4. But that often resulted in heretics joining those churches while claiming to believe the Word of God.
- I. Over time, the necessity for a church doctrinal statement became apparent.
1. Our church has such a document, and in a few weeks, we will begin a Sunday School study of it.
 2. It describes the understanding we have of what the Bible teaches in various areas.
 3. It **surrounds** us; it **encloses** us; it **defines** us.
 4. It is meant to tell the world, "**this is who we are, and if you wish to be a part of this city, you must honor what it is we believe.**"
- J. When the wall is broken down the church becomes indefensible.
1. For example, when a church has not defined what a "**church**" is, it is becomes difficult or impossible to keep out the man who believes in a fictitious universal church.
 2. When the city doesn't put its foot down on the line which defines the return of the Lord, there could easily enter a dozen different men with different opinions, & eventually those divisions will split the congregation.
 3. When the church doesn't clearly explain what it means by the "**sovereignty of God,**" then it will over time loose the doctrine of the sovereignty of God.
 4. If the church doesn't explain what constitutes the Word of God, ultimately that church will not have the Word of God, because every man will have a different rendition of what they think God has said.
- K. We aren't told exactly how Jerusalem's walls came tumbling down.
1. I would imagine that in some cases Canaanites, Amalekites and Arabians, threw hooks over the top of the walls and pulled them down, so that they could gain entry.
 2. But I can also see some of those walls simply falling over with time – due to a lack of proper maintenance.
 3. I like to preach the gospel, and I try to do it in some fashion every week – but not every service.
 4. I enjoy studying subjects like the life of David, and we often go through books verse by verse.

5. But the walls – the walls around our Jerusalem need to be maintained.
6. Doctrinal messages are a must from time to time.
7. And on occasion, we need to be like Nehemiah and try to go completely around the city.

L. In addition to the decaying walls, Jerusalem was indefensible because her gates had been burned with fire.

1. Assuming that the walls represent our doctrine, what would be the gates represent?
2. How about the ordinances? Baptism and the Lord's Supper. They are "**CHURCH ordinances.**"

M. When God's churches throw aside the Spirit's instructions about **the Lord's Supper**, they burn some of their gates and invite non-residents to enter.

1. If we practiced "**close communion,**" permitting saved members of other Baptist or Gospel churches to take the Lord's Table with us, we would be putting our stamp of approval on the doctrine of those churches.
2. And often we have no idea what those church actually believe.
3. If we practiced "**open communion,**" accepting anyone who chose to participate, we could very well be encouraging the lost in their false faith.
 - a. Some people, many professing Christians, believe that communion contributes to their salvation.
 - b. We cannot condone such false doctrine, but open communion does just that.
4. Our church, as we believe we see in the Bible, practices "**closed communion,**" closing the gates to the city on those occasions when we observe that ordinance. It is for resident's only.

N. And **baptism** is even more clearly seen as a gate into our city.

1. The Bible teaches that baptism is the immersion of a believer in water – eliminating sprinkling, pouring and the christening of unbelieving babies.
2. In order to become a resident of this Jerusalem it is necessary that someone be a believer and at least have some desire to live within the walls of the city.
3. He needs to enter through the gate of baptism.
4. Nehemiah said to Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem, "**The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem.**"

III. Those three men spearheaded the **OPPOSITION** to the purity of Jerusalem.

A. "**When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard of (my arrival), it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel.**"

1. It "**grieved**" them. That Hebrew word is twice as often translated "**it displeased them.**"
2. They became angry, furious, fearful, wrathful that someone representing Jehovah was among them.

B. In the light of this coronavirus, one of the obvious effects of our governments' reaction is seen in its hypocrisy.

1. I will grant you that churches with large attendances and small auditoriums can be a good place for the spreading of the virus – any virus.
2. But the wrath which some governors have poured upon churches, while ignoring other venues and situations, cannot be seen as anything less than a hatred for God.
3. I'm not saying that this is universal, but in some cases it appears to be obvious.
4. When some churches and Christians have tried to say that there is a greater need than usual for the preaching of repentance and surrender to God, unbelievers have replied with laughter.
5. "**Prayer for deliverance; repentance before God; submission to His Word? Ridiculous,**" they say.
6. "**But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard it, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king?**"
7. Haven't we heard the ungodly try to say that churches which assemble during this "**crisis**" are actually acting in rebellion against the public good – "**will ye rebel against the governor?**"

- C. That wicked triumphant in Jerusalem feared Nehemiah and tried to use laughter against him.
1. My mother used to tell me, *“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names can never hurt me.”*
 2. However – laughter? There is a power in wicked laughter which is hard for some people to oppose.
 3. Brethren we need to learn to smile against the laughter of the wicked – don’t crumble under it. Let them laugh.
 4. **Chapter 4** – *“But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews.*
 - a. *And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?*
 - b. *Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall.”*
- D. Another tactic of those three can be summarized by the word *“distractions.”*
1. They tried to turn Nehemiah from his work by making him some generous offers.
 2. When that didn’t work, they tried to use warnings of potential and imaginary problems.
 3. Satan has a thousand ways to turn the attention of God’s city & it’s leaders away from the service of God.

IV. What was Nehemiah’s SOLUTION to these attacks?

- A. *“Hear, O our God; for we are despised: and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity: And cover not their iniquity, and let not their sin be blotted out from before thee: for they have provoked thee to anger before the builders.”*
1. We need to learn to respond like that man.
 2. Nehemiah turned with faith, away from the enemy, toward the Lord.
 3. *“The God of heaven, he will prosper us.”*
 4. Even though he strapped it on, Nehemiah didn’t draw his sword; it wouldn’t have made the situation better.
 5. And he didn’t get angry; he didn’t burst into tears. He prayed.
- B. I referred to **Rabshakeh** last week, but not everyone knew what I was saying.
1. Rabshakeh was the military general of the Assyrian army, which was attacking and taking country after country throughout the Middle East
 2. In **II Kings 18** he was preparing to attack Judah.
 3. But first, he verbally threatened Jerusalem, and then he wrote a letter to King Hezekiah in which he pronounced all kinds of terrible things if the Jews didn’t peacefully surrender.
 4. *“And it came to pass, when king Hezekiah heard it, that he rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the LORD.*
 - a. *And Hezekiah received the letter of the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up into the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD.*
 - b. *And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD, and said, O LORD God of Israel, which dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth.*
 - c. *Now therefore, O LORD our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the LORD God, even thou only.”*
- C. This was in essence what Nehemiah did.
1. *“Nehemiah received the letter of the hand of the Sanballat’s messengers, and read it: and Nehemiah went up into the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD.”*
 2. And do you know what? First, Rabshakeh left the walls of Jerusalem without firing a single shot.
 - a. And later Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem the Arabian were proven to be just as powerless.
 - b. Jehovah stepped in in both cases and shut the mouths of the blasphemous enemy.

3. When God's people will cast aside their fears and other petty emotions, trusting the Lord and Him alone, great things will take place.
 4. In the words of Nehemiah, *"the good hand of God was upon him."*
- D. And then as the Holy Spirit empowered the presence and the words of the Nehemiah – first the priests, then the rulers, and then the people, began to lay down their fears to take up their trowels for the work.
1. *"Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work."*
 2. And what good work was that?
 - a. It was not to build fancy homes for themselves and their governor – Nehemiah the Tirshatha.
 - b. It was not to rebuild the economy, setting up shops and factories.
 - c. They didn't start buying up cheap properties, looking toward a future real estate recovery.
 3. And it was not the same work that Ezra had come to do seventeen years earlier. It was not the temple.
 4. Their work was to rebuild the protective walls of the city.
 5. And in the process, it was to expel those heathen and unbelievers who cared only to disrupt the work.
 6. *"Then answered I (Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem), and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem."*

V. Conclusion:

- A. We are living in days when churches are so distracted that they no longer can bring glory to God.
1. They are a shame and reproach to the name of God.
 2. For example, some churches cannot seem to do anything but fight with the government – about laws or about the constitution.
 3. These are days when some of the entertainment-type churches are going crazy, because their old forms of entertainment are unavailable to them.
 4. These are days when the sacerdotal churches are pointless because their priesthood can't function.
 5. There have always been those churches which gradually let their walls deteriorate until there was no difference between them and the church down the street.
 6. When I was a new believer there were clearly defined doctrines to which nearly every Baptist church adhered.
 - a. But many of those churches let their walls begin to crumble.
 - b. And today so many of those churches don't even use the word *"Baptist"* in their names let alone continue believing Baptist doctrine.
 7. These are sad days.
- B. This was the sort of thing which disturbed Nehemiah.
1. And these things should disturb us.
 2. But there isn't anything we can do about that other congregation up the street or across town.
 3. In fact, perhaps we shouldn't be overly concerned about them.
 4. The problem facing us is the circumference of walls around **our** city
 5. We should be concerned about the incursion of Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem among us.
 6. It is time to take up the trowel and to get to work.
 - a. Walls need to be repaired.
 - b. Residents need to be convert and enlisted into the work.
 - c. We need to return the King to His throne in His earthly temple.

