

I. Introduction:

- A. Have you ever been corrected by one of the religious morality police for referring to *"MY church?"*
1. *"My church meets on the corner of 12th and Spokane" – "My church is a fundamental, landmark congregation" – that sort of thing.*
 2. Has anyone, dressed in the spotless robes of the modern Pharisaic constabulary, ever corrected you, pointing out that Calvary Baptist Church is *"not YOUR church"* but the *"LORD'S church?"*
 3. If you haven't, I am happy for you, and thankful on your behalf, because I know what it is to be rebuked for that error.
 4. Of course, it was not that I had forgotten that this is the Lord's church.
 5. I was simply saying, *"The church of which I am a member is Calvary Baptist in Post Falls."*
- B. If that kind of language is sinful, then I suppose that Nehemiah was the same kind of sinner that I am.
1. Notice his dreadful slip in **verse 16** – *"And it came to pass from that time forth, that the half of MY servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shield, and the bows and the habergeons."*
 2. The tongue police should have rebuked Nehemiah for speaking of the wall-workers as *"HIS servants,"* because they were not his – they were the servants of God.
 3. Of course I am being semi-facetious – except about the Pharisaic constabulary.
 4. I'd like to finish this chapter with one more point – and it takes us back to that same police force.
- C. **Verse 6** says, *"So built we the wall."*
1. I think we could say that Nehemiah was *"successful"* in his goal – he completed the work he set off to do.
 2. But some over-righteous people might say that it was not Nehemiah who was successful.
 3. Some Pharisees think that Christians should not use the word *"success"* at all.
 4. Calvary Baptist Church in Podunk Holler had a revival meeting which was a huge success because four people were added to the church.
 5. Those same morality police tell us, *"What a terrible thing to say. We should rather praise God for His blessing on that church. Let's not talk about 'SUCCESS.'"*
 6. Well, undoubtedly we **should** praise the Lord, but is it a sin to speak of *"success"?*
- D. Is that too secular a word to use in a church service?
1. It might be, if we were trying to develop a *"how to"* plan.
 2. Christian book stores are filled with material on *"How to fill your pews and auditorium," "How to make a million dollars without compromising your faith,"* and *"How to save your marriage, you reprobate."*
 3. We don't need a Christian game-plan or business model for success; we have the Word of God.
 4. But shouldn't we be able to learn from the examples of success that we see in God's word?
- E. In considering the *"blessing"* of Jerusalem's completed wall, let's run through these verses.
1. Can you explain or rephrase all of the things said here? I'm not sure that I can, but I'm going to try.

II. A Paraphrase of the chapter.

- A. **Verse 11** – *"And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease."*
1. This is what Sanballat and the others were saying among themselves as there were plot to obstruct things at Jerusalem.
 2. **Verse 12** – *"And it came to pass, that when the Jews which dwelt by them came, they said unto us ten times, From all places whence ye shall return unto us they will be upon you."*
 - a. The *"Jews which dwelt by them"* were those residing in Samaria, Ashdod, Arabia and Ammon.
 - b. Those people were reporting to Nehemiah **what** they were hearing in those places outside Jerusalem.
 - c. Over and over again, reports arrived that if the wall-workers left the city they would be attacked.
 - d. Furthermore, they reported that attacks could occur at the city itself.

3. **Verse 13** – *“Therefore set I in the lower places behind the wall, and on the higher places, I even set the people after their families with their swords, their spears, and their bows.”*
- So Nehemiah set guards where the walls were the weakest – with a few spotters on the higher ground.
 - And we see them with their swords, spears and bows.
 - But how skilled and efficient at fighting were these farmers, jewelers, priests and Nethinim?
 - And, pardon my ignorance, but I have a hard time understanding how a spear could be a good defensive weapon.
 - Nevertheless, with the blessing of the Lord, just seeing such things could discourage an enemy attack.
4. **Verse 14** – *“And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses.”*
- Nehemiah reviewed the defensive plan with everyone and enthusiastically told any who would listen that the Lord would bless them.

- B. Verse 15** – *“And it came to pass, when our enemies heard that it was known unto us, and God had brought their counsel to nought, that we returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work.”*
- When Sanballat and his cohorts recognized that the Jews had accurate intelligence about their intentions, they tabled their attack, and the work on the wall continued uninterrupted.
 - But of course it was God who brought the counsel of the enemy to nought – to nothing.
 - Praise be to the Lord.
4. **Verse 16** – *“And it came to pass from that time forth, that the half of MY servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons; and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah.”*
- From that point until the wall was finished, Nehemiah ordered that the laborers rotate between standing guard and building walls.
 - That the rulers were *“behind all the house of Judah,”* doesn’t mean they were hiding in the shadows.
 - Rather it was just the opposite – they were *“behind & supporting the work”* – encouraging & helping.
 - In addition to mentioning the bows and spears, we also hear about **shields** and **habergeons**.
- What are habergeons, you ask?
 - They were jackets made out of twisted material, like coats of mail, but probably of thick leather.
 - I suppose some of the men wore them while working, but probably others, kept them like life-vests in the row boat – they were kept close at hand.
 - Some of them wore them like masks whenever they were at the wall, while others kept them in their pockets in case someone came to visit or inspect their work.
 - Everyone, whether they were lifting heavy rock, working the block-&tackle, mixing and passing mortar to the brick-layers or bringing up supplies from the storehouses, everyone was armed.
- C. I picture Nehemiah on his beast, with a trumpeter and perhaps a few others, riding around and around the interior of the city, encouraging the men and women as they worked.
- He reminded everyone that if they heard the trumpet, it meant that an attack was imminent.
 - They were to grab their bows and spears, determine where the attack was taking place and to get there as quickly as possible.
 - Perhaps the trumpet call would tell them the location.
 - Just to know that no matter what quadrant of the city people were attacked, there would be reinforcements if necessary, meant everyone could work a little more diligently.
 - It was an excellent plan and one which apparently they didn’t have to actually employ.
- D. Verse 21** says that they worked from the *“rising of the morning till the stars appeared.”*
- Tangentially, this makes me wonder about the temple services – ie. the morning and evening sacrifice.
 - Ordinarily there was to be a lamb offered to the Lord first thing in the morning and another at the setting of the sun.

3. Had this been reestablished since the return of the captives? If so was it being maintained at this time?
4. That there is no reference to *“the morning and evening sacrifice”* makes me wonder.
5. But it’s not my place to criticize the way that other people worship the Lord.

E. Verse 22 – *“Likewise at the same time said I unto the people, Let every one with his servant lodge within Jerusalem, that in the night they may be a guard to us, and labour on the day.”*

1. Remember that some of these wall-builders were not originally from Jerusalem – they may still have been living in Tekoah, Jericho or elsewhere, but they were there for the construction.
2. Apparently, at least initially, some of these people were tenting outside the wall sections they were building.
3. Nehemiah suggested – he ordered – that every one was to bed down inside Jerusalem so they would be easier to defend.
4. Does that mean that Nehemiah had armed guards patrolling throughout the night? It appears so.

F. Verse 23 – *“So neither I, nor my brethren, nor my servants, nor the men of the guard which followed me, none of us put off our clothes, saving that every one put them off for washing.”*

1. For fifty-two hot, tiresome days the work went on.
2. Does this confusing verse suggest that the workers didn’t change or bathe for nearly two months?
3. Some commentaries say this is exactly what it means, despite being a little hard to believe.
4. But John Gill says that the *“washing”* refers to ceremonial, religious washing which would be far more complicated and time-consuming than a quick shower.
5. Despite my lack of specific understanding, the general message of the verse is that during that time, everyone remained prepared to fight at a moment’s notice – 24/7.

III. And again verse 6 says, “So we built the wall” – we SUCCESSFULLY built the wall.

A. Sixty-four years earlier, Zerubbabel might have said, *“So we successfully rebuilt the temple.”*

1. **Ezra 6:14** – *“And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.*
 - a. *And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king.*
 - b. *And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy...”*
2. After that Ezra arrived, and he might have eventually said, *“It was a struggle, but we successfully reestablished the proper worship of Jehovah.”*

B. What does it take to enjoy *“success”* in the Lord’s work – temple building, wall building, worship building?

1. I don’t care what the Pharisaic tongue police might say, I want our church to see success – to succeed.
2. I want to successfully build this congregation.
3. I want us to successfully plant mission stations across the west, including on the Spokane Reservation.
4. And not just missions, but autonomous churches.
5. I would like us to succeed in our efforts to see the salvation of souls and in the immersion of believers.
6. One our goals ought to be the call of young men into the ministry.
7. There are so many ways in which we should plead with the Lord to bless and to give us *“success.”*

IV. Can we learn about success from studying Nehemiah?

A. I think so. What did he do to accomplish his objectives?

1. One element in Nehemiah’s success was **organization**.
2. After his initial survey, he met with the leadership of the city and expressed his concerns.

3. *“Then said I unto (the rulers of the city), 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.*
4. *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.”*

- B. I can only imagine the details of that initial meeting.
1. I am sure there was much which has not been recorded for us.
 2. When the leaders exuberantly declared their desire to build, Nehemiah probably asked the most important men, where it was they’d like to start.
 3. Then after the those choices were made, he started appointing sections to various people or groups.
 4. He became the leader of the project – the general contractor.
 5. He probably designated areas for rubbish dumps, and places for mixing mortar and gathering other supplies.
 6. There was cedar being imported for the gates and beams, and perhaps for finishing the tops of the wall.
 7. There needed to be staging places for this kind of work; storage place.
 8. Some of you might be able to better visualize all of the minute details which had to be worked out.
- C. And then there was that aspect of the **organization** which was for everyone’s **mutual protection**.
1. There was the provision of weapons and the encouragement for everyone to be armed at all times.
 2. There was the trumpeter and the trumpet calls.
 3. Perhaps he established a plan for inspection and strolling guards throughout the days and nights.
- D. As much as we want and need to depend on the Lord for success in His work, the fact remains that the actual lifting of stone, plastering, and finishing, lay in the hands of **the Lord’s workers**.
1. There were no angels at work here; the Lord didn’t miraculously make the wall to reappear.
 2. And someone needed to step forward and lead – to make decisions and to give orders.
 3. As we said last week, someone needed to step forward to act as the general manager for the project.
 4. Decisions had to be made, and ultimately there had to be one man to make them.
 5. What if no one wanted to build the southern section above the Valley of Hinnom?
 6. If no one stepped forward then it was up to Nehemiah to designate the workers.
- E. As much as some Absaloms and Jeroboams don’t like the idea, Christ has placed in His church leaders of His choosing.
1. They come with different skill sets and, to some degree, they have different levels of Christ’s authority.
 2. But the Lord has given us an organization wherein we are to serve Him – it is called Christ’s **“church.”**
 3. **Ephesians 4:7** – *“And unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.*
 - a. *Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.*
 - b. *And he gave some, apostles; & some, prophets; & some, evangelists; & some, pastors & teachers;*
 - c. *For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”*
 4. The **“edifying of the body of Christ”** might be likened to the **“building up”** of the walls of Jerusalem.
 5. I don’t believe the Lord would be angry with me for adding others to Paul’s list of leaders and workers.
 6. The Lord has given deacons, Nethinims, musicians, prayer warriors and joyful encouragers to the work of **“edifying of the body of Christ.”**
 7. There is a job for every citizen of the city, no matter how young or old.

- F. At points in history there have been churches where no one was expected to preach on a regular basis.
1. Any man, or woman could stand and begin his extemporaneous exposition of the Word of God – what a disaster.
 2. There have been and still are churches where anyone could start to sing a hymn and the rest of the congregation could join in if they knew the words.
 3. Of course, I don't suppose those churches have pianos and organs – just guitars and drums.
 4. I can just see our organist unilaterally starting one hymn while our pianist tried to start another – confusion.
 5. No, the Lord uses a limited system or organization for the *“edifying of the body of Christ”* and for His glory.
 6. For *“success”* you might say.
- G. Another part of the success of Nehemiah's enterprise was *intelligence*.
1. I suppose we could talk about Nehemiah's intelligence – his brains – but that is not my point.
 2. I'm talking about knowing the plans of the enemy – the military *“intel.”*
 3. Let's add *verse 15* to *verse 12*.
 - a. *12* says – *“And it came to pass, that when the Jews which dwelt by them came, they said unto us ten times, From all places whence ye shall return unto us they will be upon you.”*
 - b. *15* says – *“And it came to pass when our enemies heard that it was known unto us, and God had brought their counsel to nought, that we returned all of us to the wall, every one unto this work.”*
 4. People began to bring important information to Nehemiah, and he used that knowledge.
- H. In the New Testament, Paul says, *“Put on the whole armour of God,”* including the habergeon of righteousness, *“that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”*
1. We are not unfamiliar with the wiles of the devil. We are not ignorant of his devices.
 2. We should not be surprised when the Chaldeans pull down the walls before our faces – we should be able to see the attack.
 3. And perhaps we should not be surprised when it is our friend who throws rubbish down before us.
 4. The Lord Jesus warned us that sometimes *“a man's foes shall be they of his own household.”*
- I. Another aspect of Nehemiah's success was his use of *arms* – weapons.
1. Swords, spears and bows; and defensively – habergeons and shields.
 2. As servants of the Prince of Peace, we may wish we could be pacifists.
 3. But the reality is that even our Saviour said in *Matthew 10:34* – *“Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.”*
 4. Not only must we fight off the fiery darts of the wicked one, but sometimes we must take up the doctrinal sword of the Spirit and go on the attack.
 5. Goliath is not going to trip and fall in his attack of David, hitting his head and knocking his block off.
 - a. No, David is going to have to sling a deadly stone at the man to bring him down.
 - b. Success on the battlefield of Shochoh necessitated David's picking up arms.
 6. And little has changed.
- J. But having said these things, *the actual KEY* to the successful building of the wall was not the sword or the trowel; it was *the Lord – Elohim*.
1. When the threats of Sanballat filled the hearts of the people with fear, Nehemiah pointed upwards.
 2. *“And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses.”*
 3. There may be nothing wrong with keeping your eye on several things – the wall, your brethren and your family.
 4. But remember that they will not, in reality, make your arm strong and your thrust swift.

- K. *“Remember the Lord, which is great and terrible.”* What did Nehemiah mean?
1. We can use **Genesis 1** to explain the meaning of the word *“great.”*
 - a. *“And God made two **great** lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also.*
 - b. And *“And God created **great** whales* – not little whales, but great big whales.
 - c. The word *“**great**”* means large, huge, colossal.
 2. The Lord is *“**great**”* and the Lord is **frightful – terrible.**
 3. Turning the idea around, **Genesis 15:1** explains the word *“**terrible.**”*
 - a. *“After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, **Fear NOT**, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward” – I am *“**great**”* and I am your God.*
 - b. *“Remember the Lord, which is great and **fearful.**”*
 - c. Towards the saints God is huge, and toward the wicked He is great and terrible.
 4. It was God who *“had brought their counsel to nought.”*
- L. I suppose there are two ways to look at our Christian responsibilities –
1. Positively, we are in the building business – building a wall, a church, building souls.
 2. But we are also in the fighting business – struggling to defend ourselves and our loved ones from those who hate our God.
 3. Despite our responsibilities in both these aspects of our work, ultimately it was the Lord who defended those Jews and who enabled them to successfully rebuild the wall to Jerusalem.
- M. If we are looking to our own strength or wisdom to get the Lord’s work done, we will ultimately fail.
1. We will either fall flat on our faces, or what we build will not really be the Lord’s – it will be our own.
 2. If we want to see *“**Christian success**”* then we have to look to the great and terrible God, while wielding our sword and slinging our trowel.
 3. Sometimes it is difficult to balance the two – work and faith – and I suppose that is the real challenge.
 4. So we need to both **pray** for *“**success**”* and **work** for it at the same time.