

appointed to complete. And no true prophet would ask Nehemiah to violate God’s laws and illegally enter the temple. Nehemiah would not disobey God in order to gain safety from his enemy. When you are given counsel, ensure the words align with God’s truth. Is it God’s will for us to rip off the government at tax time? No. Is it God’s will for me to pursue marriage with a non-believer? No. Is it God’s will for me to lie for my employer to keep my job? No. Is it God’s will to exaggerate and over promise to get the sale, make the team. No. Should a man like me do that? Answer: no!

I wonder how many times I have given into my fears and temptations, failed to trust him and missed out on seeing God work in an adventurous way?

I said all that to set up verse 16. **Watch God at work.** The wall is finished. Mission accomplished in 52 days. Even the enemy had to admit that God was at work. “They lost their confidence and recognized that this work could only be accomplished with the help of God.” People outside the faith can’t explain it. For 150 years people had tried to rebuild the wall. It wasn’t they didn’t know how important it was to the city, they just couldn’t ever pull it off. It was too big, too much rubble, too much resistance, too great a project of 20 feet high 10 feet thick and perhaps 2-1/2 miles long. Yet in just 52 days it was done. All the surrounding nations could do was to shake their heads and admit. Wow. That had to be a God-thing.

Remember when Elijah had a showdown with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. (I Kings 18) The contest involved 450 of Baal priests pitted against one prophet of God, Elijah. Which side could get their alter to burn, which God would consume their sacrifice without lighting it on fire themselves? The Baal prophets danced around and chanted loudly and even cut themselves to prove their devotion, but no fire. Nothing. Toward the end of the day they gave out exhausted. Elijah rebuilt an alter to God. He didn’t want to be accused of magic fire tricks so he had the alter drenched in water three times, then he prayed. Fire from heaven consumed the sacrifice so decisively. The people all said, “Woah. That was God”. What just happened makes no logical sense, they went home to their families and said, “I just can’t explain it, had to be power and work of God.”

In I Samuel 17 the army of Israel was being taunted and terrorized by a giant called Goliath. They couldn’t see beyond the giant. The army commanders were all looking for someone big enough to fight him. They got it all wrong. God was looking for someone small enough so that when the giant was taken down the people would exclaim, “God did that!” God is bigger. God is greater than any giant that looms large right now in your life. When David

threw his stone and the giant fell, all the Philistine army ran away in fear. Why? Because they recognized God at work.

What has happened in your life that could only have been pulled off because God was at work? What are you trusting God for right now? What in your life can people who are watching from the side fully explain about it? Has God moved to restore a relationship that everyone wrote off as impossible? Has God provided resources from out of nowhere for you when there was no logical way? Has God given you courage, strength or healing when you had nothing left in the tank, when the doctors were left scratching their heads. Have you stood up strong in the face of temptation? Have you overcome the tal- ons of addiction? Has your faith remained strong when there was no healing or provision? Has God given you a love, an ability to forgive when all your friends counsel revenge, dump him, leave?

Dare to trust. Dare to love. Dare to walk in faith when everything natural inside screams for you to give in to your fears. You are no longer a slave to fear Remember your true identity. I am a child of God. He loves you, O how he loves you. His love for you is deep. God proved his love, proved how much he values us by sending his son to die so that we might have life. He marked us with His name; giving us true identity. He calls us His own. O that deep, deep love of Jesus. Will His love pierce your heart this morning? Will you come to Him? Come.

“Most Dangerous Temptation”

Sermon Series: Nehemiah



Catalog No. 364  
Nehemiah 6:10-19  
Pastor Norm Schwab  
April 15, 2018

C.S. Lewis wrote, “No clever arrangement of bad eggs will make a good omelet.” You can fix eggs in hundreds of ways. I have eaten them scrambled, hard boiled and soft boiled. I have eaten them sun- nyside up and over easy. I have poached eggs and fried eggs. I have nugged and omleted a few eggs. I have even traitorously Benedicted eggs. Once as a kid I put some green food coloring on my eggs and ate them with ham. I have been called a good egg and an egg head. I have been egged on and have had egg on my face. Eggs have been sculpted and painted into Faberge’s worth millions, and at the same time been throw at others as worthless pro- jectiles of scorn. It’s amazing the various creative ways eggs have been put to use, but one thing re- mains true. The egg must be a good egg, not old and rotten egg. Just looking at it from the outside can be hard to tell which it is. No matter how it is prepared, “no clever arrangement of bad eggs will make a good omelet.”

In our story this morning, Nehemiah faces the most dangerous of temptations yet. It’s a subtle, clever attack that looks really good on the surface, it’s creative and even appealing. It’s most danger- ous in that the deception comes from those who are supposed to be his friends, supposed to have his best interest in mind, on his side, concerned for his well-being. The attacks against Nehemiah are no longer coming against him from outside the wall, Now they are attacking the man from the inside. The enemies were not able to put a halt to the wall building project through physical threats, discour- agement, criticism, compromise or slanderous ru- mors...so now they are putting on the face of Mr. Good guy. They hire a ‘friend’ inside the walls of Jerusalem to induce Nehemiah to preserve his own life, a very legitimate need, but to do it in an illegiti- mate way. The evil one just doesn’t give up, does he? If you are doing God’s work in God’s way, ex- pect opposition. Satan wants us governed by fear and imprisoned by the opinions and pressure of others. He will do whatever it takes to trip you up and hold you down and take you out of the journey.

I want to see God at work. I want to see God do things in my life and through my life that even the enemy must admit, it had to come from God. Don’t you long for that? Don’t you long to see God move in victory, in triumph, and do His renovation, restoration, reclamation work so powerfully that even the enemy must stop and admit that had to be God at work. I wonder how often I miss out in see- ing God do that kind of work? I wonder how often I have given in to my fears, given in to my tempta- tions, given in to shortcuts and compromises trying to do the right thing in a wrong way, trying to make

an omelet out of bad eggs. Trying to fulfill a legiti- mate need in an illegitimate way. How often have I failed to step out in adventure and dared to trust Jesus, especially when it’s hard? If you step out in faith, will you be opposed? Yes, expect it., but also expect to be surprised, even astounded at what God will do that will leave even the enemies jaw drop- ping, forced to say, “Wow. Ok. That was God.” That is where we are heading this morning. Like the last couple of attacks, we will spend time exposing the temptation attack so we can see what it looks like as its heading our way, then we will observe Nehe- miah’s example as our right response to stand strong in the face of this most dangerous of tempta- tions.

Turn with me in your Bibles to Nehemiah chapter 6. Sandwiched in the middle of this section about insider attacks is a fairly non-descript sen- tence in verse 15. “The wall was completed on the 25<sup>th</sup> of Elul, in 52 days.” Let me give you a recap of the timeline of events. It was in the month of Kislev (Nov-Dec) 444BC that Nehemiah’s brother, Hanani traveled from Jerusalem to Susa to present the problem of Jerusalem’s walls to Nehemiah. The bro- ken-down walls of God’s holy city broke Nehemiah’s heart. After several months of much praying and planning, Nehemiah presented his proposal to King Artaxerxes in the month of Nisan, what we are now in? (March-April) It took Nehemiah several months to prepare for and then make the trip, arriving in Jerusalem sometime in late June-July. The wall began toward the end of July and was completed 52 days later in our month of September, the 25<sup>th</sup> of Elul (El-luel) 443BC. That is a very big deal. It’s an amazing accomplishment by God working through the people and I would expect a whole lot of praise God, celebration, singing and dancing. More detail about the celebration will come in chapter 12, but it did make me think about a celebration we will have later this year when our new building project will be completed and our praises will sound throughout north Spokane. I can’t wait! It is amazing how God has raised up His people to join in this project.

Ok. Let’s read Nehemiah 6:10-19 and be lis- tening for the attack and Nehemiah’s response. (V.10) Nehemiah must have trusted the prophet Shemaiah because he goes to meet him at his home. It doesn’t say what reason Shemaiah gave to Nehemiah. Perhaps he sent a message, “I have very important information to give. Your life is in danger. I too am afraid. It’s not safe for me to leave the house, come if you are able.” Shemaiah drips with concern, a plastic friendship with a pretense of great worry for Nehemiah’s safety. Shemaiah prom- ises to reveal a plot against his life. His words in-

tend to instill fear and paranoia in Nehemiah’s brain. They coming to get you. (V.10) They will be coming at night. It’s tough to sleep at night knowing there is an assassin coming. You start to hear noises outside. Nehemiah, rustling in the bushes. That creak in the house could be someone in the living room. Midnight assassins. They are out to get you Nehemiah, “I’m a prophet” pulling out the “God told me so” card. So you had better think of some creative way to get us out of the this jam. Hey, I’ve got an idea. What is it? We can both go take refuge in the temple. They wouldn’t dare come in after you there. Look, we are both in trouble for doing God’s work. Let’s hide in the temple until this all blows over. It sounds pretty good doesn’t it? The problem is the prophet was making it all up. There was never any midnight assassin. He was being paid to make it all up (V.13) and frighten Nehemiah into sinning by going taking refuge in the temple.

Now some probably remember from your Old Testament study there was a provision if a person who had accidentally killed someone and was being threatened with revenge by angry relatives. They could enter the temple courtyard and cling to the horns of the alter for protection until a judge could hear their case. But Shemaiah was suggesting taking refuge inside the temple and close the doors behind them. Numbers 18:7 was clear, that anyone who was a layman like Nehemiah and not a priest would desecrate the temple if they entered the temple. When King Uziah tried to enter the holy rooms in the temple, he was struck with leprosy. Shemaiah was attempting to get Nehemiah to fulfill a very legitimate need, protecting his own life (which certainly would qualify as a legitimate need), but to save it in an illegitimate way-taking refuge inside the temple. Nehemiah was tempted to accept a false sense of security, instead of trusting in God to protect him.

We can’t sin our way out of fear or trouble. In Genesis 20 Abraham was afraid that the King of Gerar would see how beautiful his wife Sarah was and kill him and take her. So he told him, Sarah was her sister. He deceived trying to protect his own life and it failed miserably. What lie was Abraham believing? This problem is too big for God? King Gerar is bigger and more powerful than God? God can’t protect me, so I must do whatever I can to save my own neck. What lies do you believe? What fears do you give into? I will always be alone. I will be stuck in this relationship and never be happy. God won’t ever provide. God doesn’t see or care about my needs... and so we get tempted to fulfill a legitimate need in an illegitimate way. Why are you pursuing dating, entertaining thoughts of marriage with that gal, that guy who doesn’t even share your love for following Christ? Why are you lying, exaggerating the products you sell and misrepresenting the timeline you can deliver them? You need to earn money for your family? Certainly a le-

gitimate need, but why pursue them in an illegitimate way? We can never sin our way out of fear or trouble.

I want to come back to Nehemiah’s response in verse 11, but let’s take a look at the other temptation, the other temptation that sandwiches in the short announcement of the walls completion at the end of the chapter. Take a look at verses 17-19. This is another inside attack masterminded by Tobiah. He is from Ammon east of the Jordan river, but he has a Hebrew name. Tov is Hebrew for ‘good’. So he is Mr. Goodguy. Tobiah married a Jewess. His son also married a Jewish girl. From chapter 13:4 we find he is related to Eliashib the high priest. He has made strategic agreements, political, financial and marital with some of the leading families in Judah. He was seen by many as one who lived up to his name as a good guy who did favors and good deeds to curry favor with the nobles in exchange for their loyalty and information. (V.19) You can smell the pressure to accept Tobiah. I’m sure there was plenty of pressure, “Give Tobiah a break. Mr. Goodguy has done a lot of good things. Meet with him. Compromise. Work out your differences. Negotiate.” Tobiah was a classic politician who perfected the art of schmoozing. (V.18-19) The evil one has been doing this for a very long time. Remember when the Devil tempted Jesus in the desert with many ‘good things’? I will give you bread, power, glory. These are all good and rightful things for the son of God, but Satan wanted to give Jesus a short cut, an illegitimate way to satisfy a legitimate need. Jesus answered all the devils temptations by quoting the Word of God. Do you see the temptation now coming from people who are supposed to be on your side? It looks good, but no clever arrangement of bad eggs can make a good omelet. No matter how attractive, we can never sin our way out of fear or trouble.

Did you notice it was right after the great victory, the amazing completion of the wall that Nehemiah mentioned Tobiah’s subversive, inside attack? Even after the wall is completed Tobiah continues to be a real pain in the neck. Here’s the truth. Satan won’t give up even when it looks like he’s lost the battle, so don’t let down your guard after a victory. You’ve had a great worshipful Sunday? You are more vulnerable on Monday. You’ve enjoyed a mighty victory over temptation on Friday evening. Don’t relax on Saturday morning. Be just as watchful after the great victory as before the battle. Satan is still at work. He was defeated soundly at the cross of Christ, but he continues to fight and struggle all the more. If you can’t see Satan working its quite probable he has gone underground. It’s far more easy to fight him when its obvious and you can see what he is up to. The difficult attacks come more quietly, from the inside, right after Nehemiah thought the battle had all been won. People who have made huge progress in their relationships;

people who have experienced great victories in their addictions, weight loss, thought life, finances, relationships are vulnerable. You are so close, just on the edge of completion...be on the guard as you will be vulnerable to sliding right back into past habits, old relationships. Don’t allow the pride of success lull you into a false sense of security. What are you so close to completing that you need to finish well? I Corinthians 10:12 says, “Let him who think he stands, take heed lest he fall.”

Do you want to stand strong in the face of the most dangerous of temptations? I don’t want to miss out because I’ve given into my fears and temptations. Do you want to stand strong in faith so that you can see God at work, doing things only God can do? Are you ready to step out into the wild adventure of faith in following God? Let’s go back and look at verse 11. Nehemiah’s response to Shemaiah when he gets told this story about a midnight assassin coming and wants them both to sinfully take refuge in the temple. Nehemiah stood strong in the face of temptation because he **remembered who he was**. (V.11) “Should a man like me flee?...I will not go in.” Who was Nehemiah? A man appointed by God to lead and rebuild the walls of the Jerusalem and rebuild the people. He had trusted God to provide and protect in so many ways, should he now turn tail and run? If Nehemiah gave into his fear, what kind of message would that send to the people of Jerusalem? To the surrounding countries? It reminds me of Daniel in the lion’s den. I will not bow down and worship the image of the king. That is not me. That is not in keeping with who I am as a follower of the one and only God. Daniel stood strong in the face of temptation because He remembered who He was and even more, remembered who God is. Should a man like me deny God in order to save my own neck?

In the spring of 1939 WWII, a 32-year-old German pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, learned that all men his age had to register with the German military to support the Nazi cause. To refuse meant a trip to the concentration camp. But in June he received an invitation to teach at Union Seminary in New York. Happy for a way out of his dilemma, he booked passage to America. He landed in New York, safe but unhappy, he stayed only 26 days, returning to Berlin. For 5 years he rallied the churches of Germany to oppose Hitler’s madness. He was arrested and sent to a prison camp where 1945 in just two weeks before the United States army liberated the camp, they executed him. 39 years old. Courage. Should a man like me run away?

In this week’s issue of *World Magazine* (April 14, 2018 p.48) I read about the Boko Haram militants and who on February 10, 2018 had abducted 111 girls from a boarding school in Dapchi, Nigeria. All of them have now been released except one, a 15-year-old Christian girl named Leah Sharibu. Witnesses say all she had to do was renounce Christi-

anity. She refused to convert to Islam in order to gain her freedom. As of this morning she is still being held captive. How can she stand strong in the face of life threats? She knew who she was and who God is. Should a girl like me deny my God to save my own neck?

Nehemiah and these others had courage. Courage is not the absence of fear, but the resolve to do what is right even when we feel afraid. This is not natural or easy. But Nehemiah knew this work of God was not dependent on him. He recognized that he had been chosen by God to be part of something far bigger than himself. He knew God would accomplish His work in His way even if humans would kill him. The wall work would go on without him. If I was taken out next week, the work of Northview mission would go right on without me. We are wise to plan, the security team is working behind the scenes to be make sure we are as safe as we can be while we worship here. But like Daniel, Bonhoeffer, Leah and Nehemiah, we put our trust in God. We move forward in faith, not fear, by remembering who we are and who God is. Are you faced with temptation? Fear? Ask yourself, “Should a woman like me be doing that or thinking that.” Should a teenage boy like me be involved with that, say those words, engage in those activities. Do you know who you are? Then live like it and stand strong. In High School when I would go out with my friends on Friday evening my mom would call out to me as I was getting into the car with my buddies, “Remember who you are!” A child of the king, a follower of Christ. A member of the Schwab family.

I can stand strong when I remember my mission. Nehemiah was focused. 6:3, “I am doing a great work, I cannot come down.” Those of you who have served in the military get this. Facing enemy fire is terrifying, but you are soldier. You are trained to do your job even in the face of fear. That is courage. Doing what you are called to do even when fearful. Keep your mission objective. Keep an eye on the goal, the target. Don’t allow fear to cloud your mission.

It’s toughest when like Nehemiah, you have to dodge friendly fire, people you think are on your side? How can you tell whether the counsel given is from God or not? Shemaiah was a prophet, claimed to speak for God, supposed to be on Nehemiah’s team. How can I decide if they are a genuine friend or a deceitful manipulator giving advice for their own gain? When someone claims to have a special message for you from God, and it may be more than just one. (V.14) Multiple men and women prophets were saying, “watch out!”. It must be from God right? Not if it goes against God’s word. God’s work will never violate God’s word. That wisdom, that discernment, will be rooted in the knowledge of God’s word. Nehemiah smelled out two flaws with the prophesy. First, God would not ask Nehemiah to run from a project nearing completion he was