

Built and Battened Down

Nehemiah 6:15-19 HCSB The wall was completed in 52 days, on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul. (16) When all our enemies heard this, all the surrounding nations were intimidated and lost their confidence, for they realized that this task had been accomplished by our God. (17) During those days, the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah's *letters* came to them. (18) For many in Judah were bound by oath to him, since he was a son-in-law of Shecaniah son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam son of Berechiah. (19) These nobles kept mentioning Tobiah's good deeds to me, and they reported my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to intimidate me.

Look at what verse 15 tells us.

God's will accomplished (v.15) *The wall was completed in 52 days*

Allow me to make a parable of this remarkable achievement. Just as they built this defensive wall in 52 days, so the year furnishes us with 52 days of special work with God. Our spiritual wall-building principally takes place in church, with our brothers and sisters, while studying the Word and worshipping God together.

How quickly the days pass! How easily we are distracted by the cheap and tawdry pleasures of the world and led to miss the permanent and wholesome joys of Christian fellowship. It is during those times of worship when we are reminded of what we should and should not be doing and every time we miss one of those opportunities, our wall, our spiritual fortification that helps keep the enemy out, is a little weaker for it.

What opportunities they offer!

Worship in God's House offers **spiritual rest** from the slights and nicks of the world.

It offers opportunities of **spiritual friendship** – something distressingly rare out among the Lowlanders!

It brings opportunities for **divine instruction**. As we go about our work week, the lessons we marked onto the chalkboards of our hearts are rubbed off, or at least rubbed into an indefinite blur. When we return to the House of God we get a chance to renew the writing of the Holy Spirit's will onto our hearts.

It brings opportunities for **moral renewal**. It is when we return to the foot of the cross, sit at the feet of the Master, and hold our lives up to His unblemished standard that we realize what steps must be taken to improve our character.

It brings opportunities for **refreshing hope**. God's shining truths break into the dim light of our lives, bringing new insight, discernment into the deep things of the universe, and a knowledge that behind all of the suffering and despair is a God who knows us, loves us, and has a plan for our positive good.

Now let's look carefully at verse 16.

God's will recognized (v. 16) *...they realized that this task had been accomplished by our God.*

That the work was divinely inspired should not surprise us. God is looking for a few hardy souls who will seize the day, seize the opportunity to bring lasting good to a world staggering under the weight of its sins.

- **Isaiah 6:8 HCSB** Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying: Who should I send? Who will go for Us? I said: Here I am. Send me.

The Lord is not only willing to choose us but give us the message and empower us.

- **Jeremiah 1:4-8 HCSB** The word of the LORD came to me: (5) I chose you before I formed you in the womb; I set you apart before you were born. I appointed you a

prophet to the nations. (6) But I protested, "Oh no, Lord GOD! Look, I don't know how to speak since I am *only* a youth." (7) Then the LORD said to me: Do not say: I am *only* a youth, for you will go to everyone I send you to and speak whatever I tell you. (8) Do not be afraid of anyone, for I will be with you to deliver you. *This is the LORD's declaration.*

The Lord is willing to use nobodies. Anyone humble enough to obey is qualified for service.

- **Amos 7:14-15 HCSB** So Amos answered Amaziah, "I was not a prophet or the son of a prophet; rather, I was a herdsman, and I took care of sycamore figs. (15) But the LORD took me from following the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to My people Israel.'"

See what I mean?

That the enemies of God's people recognized it as divine work should not surprise us. The trouble with God's enemies is not that they are stupid. It is not that their knowledge is defective but that their hearts are hardened. The salvation of souls is not a matter of superior education but is a matter of hearts broken over sin. *The human heart is never so whole as when it is broken over sin.*

The rashaim (the wicked who rebel against God) have evidence of God's work literally piling up in full view but it produces no change in their opposition. Sanballat was mad and frustrated because he knew that our people were weak, unorganized, and without resources. He **KNEW** that we couldn't do it. He had said so publicly. So when he saw the wall not only built, but built well and in only 52 days, he had to acknowledge that this was a work of God – yet, this knowledge did not stop his opposition.

This is exactly the same problem the Jewish leaders had in the New Covenant.

- **John 11:47-48 HCSB** So the chief priests and the Pharisees convened the Sanhedrin and said, "What are we going to do since this man does many signs? (48) If we let Him continue in this way, everybody will believe in Him! Then the Romans will come and remove both our place and our nation."
- **John 11:53 HCSB** So from that day on they plotted to kill Him.

"Hello! You're admitting that He's performing miracles!" They knew what he was doing. By the way, pay careful attention to the fact that even Jesus' enemies, who were first-hand witnesses, did not deny His miracles. Isn't it a little arrogant for men 2000 years removed to deny them now? Nevertheless, the point is that they knew what He was doing was miraculous, yet they plotted to kill Him anyway.

Similarly,

- **James 2:19-20 HCSB** You believe that God is one; you do well. The demons also believe--and they shudder. (20) Foolish man! Are you willing to learn that faith without works is useless?

The demons believe in one God and they have an emotional reaction to it! It's not even just an intellectual assent! They feel it in their gut. Yet, they remain unchanged.

It is not enough for you to believe in God. It is not enough for you to acknowledge His work among His people. It is not enough for you to even fear God, if that fear does not drive you to your knees. Foolish one! Don't you realize that faith that does not result in works is useless – that it is dead faith and cannot save you?

- **James 1:22 HCSB** But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

Listen in wonder over God's grace.

- **Philippians 2:13 HCSB** For it is God who is working in you, *enabling you both to will and to act* for His good purpose.

That's how dependent we are upon Him. We need Him to make us want to want to want to do what's right! How pathetic is that? Yet, He loves us enough to not only give us the will but even the ability to act for His good purpose.

Let's move on to verse 17.

God's will opposed (vv. 17-19) *the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them.*

The nobles on the inside were communing with the foe on the outside. Unfortunately, this still happens in modern congregations. All of us know of some church, indeed several churches, in this county whose leadership was communing with the enemy and fell as a result.

It's strange. It's almost as if these leaders feel like they are above falling. They think they can toy with the enemies of God and escape unscathed. Do they think their status will protect them? Do they think their education will offer sanctuary?

Worldly Influence and respectability has killed the spiritual life of many a man. Let a man make a meager living and he will be faithful and diligent in God's work. Let this man invent some new worldly toy and make some money, let this man inherit or in some other manner find his income change and you no longer find him in Sunday School. Suddenly rain or cold air will keep him from prayer meetings that he would never have missed before.

Worldly Influence and respectability is contemptible when it opposes God.

- **Psalms 2:2-6 HCSB** The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers conspire together against the LORD and His Anointed One: (3) "Let us tear off their chains and free ourselves from their restraints." (4) The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord ridicules them. (5) Then He speaks to them in His anger and terrifies them in His wrath: (6) "I have consecrated My King on Zion, My holy mountain."

Worldly POWER is contemptible. Pile all the crowns, scepters, swords, cannons, thrones, statues, palaces, and monuments on one side of the scale. Place the will of God on the other side. There will be no contest. God's King, the Anointed Son, will break them with a rod of iron. He will shatter them like pottery.

- **Psalms 2:10-12 HCSB** So now, kings, be wise; receive instruction, you judges of the earth. (11) Serve the LORD with reverential awe, and rejoice with trembling. (12) Pay homage to the Son, or He will be angry, and you will perish in your rebellion, for His anger may ignite at any moment. All those who take refuge in Him are happy.

Worldly OPPOSITION is contemptible. A Jew from Galilee sat down on a hillside and told a small crowd that He thought that each one should do to others what he or she would like done to themselves. That's how small it started. Against this insignificant act, God's enemies have fought, and struggled for 2000 years, blunting their swords and shattering their arrows in a futile attempt to squelch Yahweh Melek's will. Like a great stone rolling inexorably down a hill,¹ the will and work of God has crushed every enemy stupid enough to get in the way in useless opposition.

Brothers and sisters, church of God, do not fear when the "mighty" and the "powerful" oppose the ministry of the Gospel. Be not weary in well doing and you will certainly reap if you don't quit.²

Worldly influence and respectability must be dealt with. Nehemiah responded by switching his work from building the wall to fortifying and organizing the people INSIDE the walls. What should we do when the nobility of our days oppose the work of God?

¹ Daniel 2:34-45

² Galatians 6:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:13; Hebrews 12:3

Do not provoke them. If the lion is asleep and you can pass its den safely, then be quiet and don't draw attention to yourself. Seek to lead a quiet life. Mind your own business and work with your own hands so that you may walk properly in the presence of Lowlanders and not be dependent on anyone (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12). Pray that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

Do not fear them. Their seeming power is hollow. The powerful may sneer at you but I assure you that they go to bed and lie awake all night wondering if you are not right after all. Do not let them sway your convictions.³ Do not let them dampen your hope. God is strong. Truth is mighty. If you endure in your obedience you will find yourself standing with all your enemies conquered and lying prone around you. Why? Because you are mighty? Absolutely not. It is because God's will is implacable. God's will is resolute and backed by grim sovereign power. Those who side with that are equally irresistibly victorious.

Nehemiah got the walls built, but his job was not done. The outer defenses were in place but internal weaknesses remained and so he turned his attention to those. Similarly, salvation (as wonderful as that gift may be) is not the end of the battle. It is the beginning. Our outer defenses may be in place. Our souls may rest secure in their eventual glorification but inner weaknesses remain. We must seek them out. We must root them out. We must seek to leave nothing of the old man in us. We must constantly work to conform ourselves to the image and likeness of our Master until He returns to reign.

³ Acts 5:29