



"Joining the Mission of God" (Nehemiah 3-4)

I. INTRO

A. We probably have people in the room who have visited the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican. Michelangelo's nine renowned paneled frescoes depicting Genesis are thought by some people to be the most exquisite art in the history of the world.



B. Did you know that Michelangelo suffered from despair and discouragement?

1. He wrote a poem while he was working on the Sistine Chapel (you can find it online). It's actually quite humorous.
2. One reviewer said Michelangelo is, "vigorously lamenting his discomfort, pain, and inadequacy to the task."
3. The final stanza of the poem reads:

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My painting is dead.

Defend it for me, Giovanni, protect my honor.

I am not in the right place—I am not a painter.

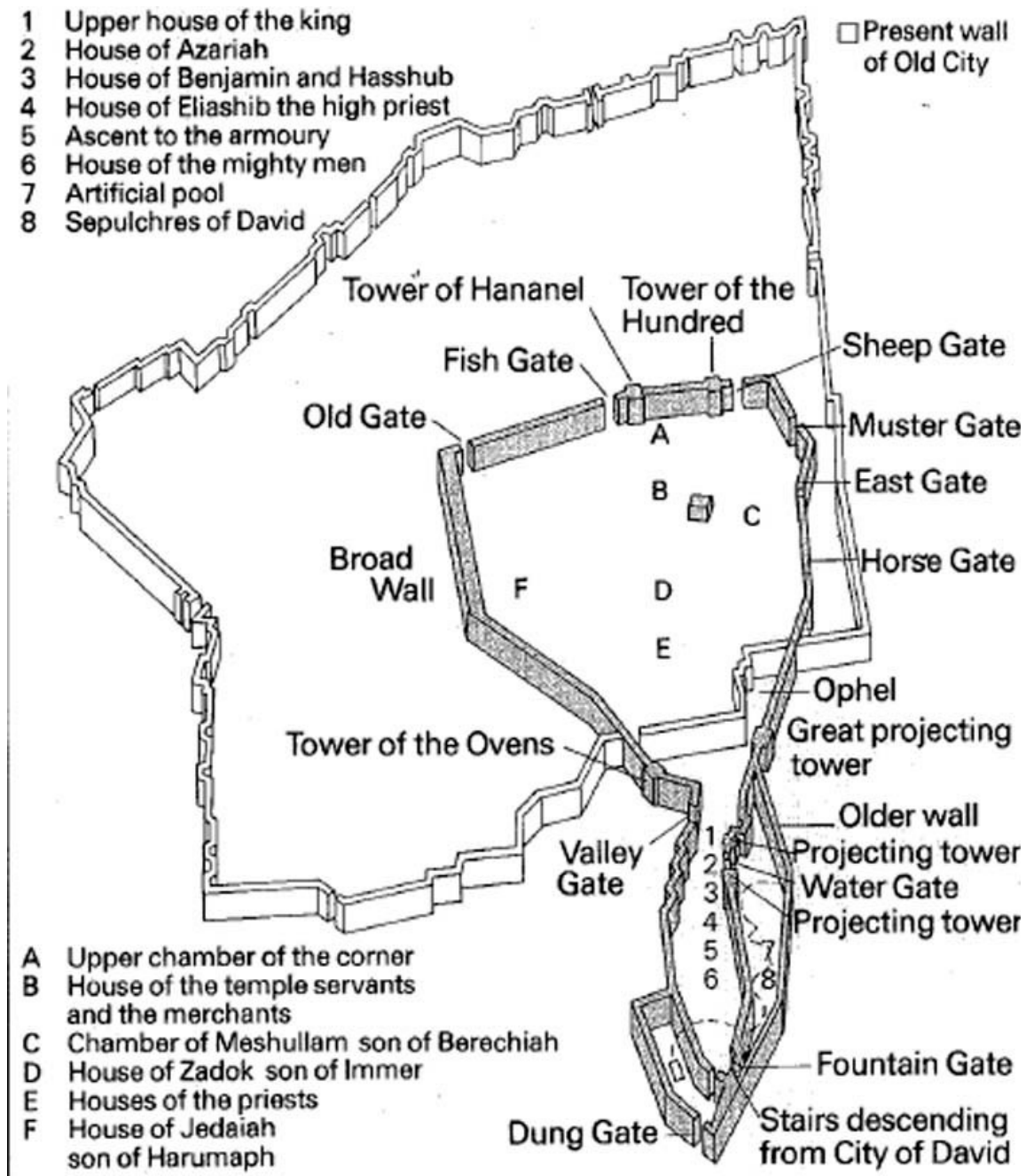
- C. C.S. Lewis once said: "If Satan's arsenal of weapons were restricted to a single one - it would be discouragement."
- D. Discouragement is a disease unique to human beings (except for, maybe, Eeyore), and discouragement is universal -- eventually everyone gets it. There's no doubt that everyone in the room has experienced it – there's probably several people here who are deeply discouraged right now.
- E. We've been studying the book of Nehemiah... ¹
1. 1,000 years after Moses and 400 years before the birth of Jesus, the Jewish people were in a desperate and discouraged state.
 2. After 70 years of captivity, the Jewish people were given the opportunity to return to their land. Out of the some 2-3 million deported from the land, only about 50,000 decided to return.
 3. The Book of Nehemiah begins 15 years after the Book of Ezra ends; almost 100 years after the first captives came back; and about 150 years after the city of Jerusalem was destroyed.
 4. The walls of the city of Jerusalem were still in rubble. No one thought this obstacle could be overcome, so the walls lay in ruin, and the people were in a state of continual discouragement.
- F. Nehemiah has his heart broken over the condition of Jerusalem and the people who lived there.
1. He hears that name of God is not being honored in the surrounding region and the exiles that are returning are not being protected.
 2. Nehemiah is both a preview of Jesus and the Church
 - a. Neh shows us Jesus in that he left the comfort and the opulence of the palace to step into the rubble of the city walls – and the rubble of a deeply discouraged people.
 - b. Neh shows us the Church in that we have the same calling – to step into the rubble of a broken world to offer the hope and supreme encouragement of the gospel.

¹ <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/guzik/commentaries/1601.htm>

3. Neh is a man who loves God and those made in God's image; he has a passion for God and compassion for God's people.

G. Today we will see the people begin to rise up and build this wall – it's a beautiful picture of the Church working together. Neh rallies the people and reminds them that God is with them – and they all begin to build the wall.

H. I will read the first five verses of Neh 3 and then skip to Neh 4 and read the whole chapter, then I will pray, and we'll jump in...



"Then Eliashib the high priest arose with his brothers the priests and built the Sheep Gate; they consecrated it and hung its doors. They consecrated the wall to the Tower of the Hundred and the Tower of Hananel. ² Next to him the men of Jericho built, and next to them Zaccur the son of Imri built. ³ Now the sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate; they laid its beams and hung its doors with its bolts and bars. ⁴ Next to them Meremoth the son of Uriah the son of Hakkoz made repairs. And next to him Meshullam the son of Berechiah the son of Meshezabel made repairs. And next to him Zadok the son of Baana also made repairs. ⁵ Moreover, next to him the Tekoites made repairs, but their nobles did not support the work of their masters... [Chap 4] Now it came about that when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became furious and very angry and mocked the Jews. ² He spoke in the presence of his brothers and the wealthy men of Samaria and said, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Are they going to restore it for themselves? Can they offer sacrifices? Can they finish in a day? Can they revive the stones from the dusty rubble even the burned ones?" ³ Now Tobiah the Ammonite was near him and he said, "Even what they are building—if a fox should jump on it, he would break their stone wall down!" ⁴ Hear, O our God, how we are despised! Return their reproach on their own heads and give them up for plunder in a land of captivity. ⁵ Do not forgive their iniquity and let not their sin be blotted out before You, for they have demoralized the builders. ⁶ So we built the wall and the whole wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work. ⁷ Now when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repair of the walls of Jerusalem went on, and that the breaches began to be closed, they were very angry. ⁸ All of them conspired together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause a disturbance in it. ⁹ But we prayed to our God, and because of them we set up a guard against them day and night. ¹⁰ Thus in Judah it was said,

*'The strength of the burden bearers is failing,
Yet there is much rubbish;
And we ourselves are unable
To rebuild the wall.'*

¹¹ Our enemies said, "They will not know or see until we come among them, kill them and put a stop to the work." ¹² When the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times, "They will come up against us from every place where you may turn," ¹³ then I stationed men in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, the exposed places, and I stationed the people in families with their swords, spears and bows. ¹⁴ When I saw their fear, I rose and spoke to the nobles, the officials and 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 houses.” ¹⁵ When our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had frustrated their plan, then all of us returned to the wall, each one to his work. ¹⁶ From that day on, half of my servants carried on the work while half of them held the spears, the shields, the bows and the breastplates; and the captains were behind the whole house of Judah. ¹⁷ Those who were rebuilding the wall and those who carried burdens took their load with one hand doing the work and the other holding a weapon. ¹⁸ As for the builders, each wore his sword girded at his side as he built, while the trumpeter stood near me. ¹⁹ I said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, “The work is great and extensive, and we are separated on the wall far from one another. ²⁰ At whatever place you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us.” ²¹ So we carried on the work with half of them holding spears from dawn until the stars appeared. ²² At that time I also said to the people, ‘Let each man with his servant spend the night within Jerusalem so that they may be a guard for us by night and a laborer by day.’ ²³ So neither I, my brothers, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us removed our clothes, each took his weapon even to the water.” [pray]

II. BODY

A. We have three main points to consider today (each one will help us to defeat discouragement):

1. **There is a place for EVERYONE to serve in the mission of God in and through the local church.**
2. **When people are on mission with God there will ALWAYS be opposition.**
3. **The RESPONSE to opposition is a rhythm of prayer, strategic planning, strong decisive leadership, and attentiveness.**

B. We will look at them one at a time:

1. **There is a place for EVERYONE to serve in the mission of God in and through the local church.** First of all, we need to ask...
 - a. What IS the mission of God? “Go therefore [into the rubble] and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” --Matthew 28:19-20 (notation added)
 - b. Who worked on the walls and the gates? Priests, people from surrounding cities and villages (3:2, 4), the Tekoites (another city in Judah

came to help -- but their nobles did not support the work) (3:5), we see goldsmiths and perfumers (3:8), merchants (3:32), civic officials (3:14-16), women (3:12), the temple servants living in Ophel came and made repairs (3:26).

- c. People began to repair portions of the wall outside their own homes. [Genius!!]
- d. Whatever God is going to do He wants to do through ALL of His people. Every person has an important role to play. There are high profile places and there are obscure places (i.e., dung gate), but the people came together to build!
- e. There are several different metaphors for the church listed throughout the NT: the most common one is a human body, another is the bride of Christ, another is one new man (Eph 2:15), another is a family. Peter, however uses construction language when he writes: *"You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."* --1 Peter 2:5 [maybe he's thinking about Neh when he's writing??]
- f. J.D. Greear – *Gaining By Losing*: says we need a fundamental shift in *how we think* about the mission of the church and illustrates this point using three types of ships:²
 - 1) Some Christians see church as a cruise liner, offering Christian luxuries for the whole family—sports, entertainment, childcare services, and business networking. They show up at church asking only, "Can this church improve my religious quality of life? Does it have good family ministry facilities? Does the pastor preach funny, time-conscious messages that meet my felt needs? Do I like the music?"
 - 2) If their church ever ceases to cater to their preferences...well, there are plenty of other cruise ships in the harbor. In fact, often they get involved with three or four of them at once. After all, the music is great on Cruise Liner A, and the kids enjoy the youth program at Cruise Liner B, and we do most of our fellowship and Bible study

² J.D. Greear. *Gaining By Losing*, Zondervan 2015:27-28.

with friends at Cruise Liner C, and we occasionally podcast the angry young pastor down the road who tells the funny stories.

- 3) Greear writes: Other Christians believe their church is more like a *battleship*. The church is made for mission, and its success should be seen in how loudly and dramatically it fights the mission. This is certainly better than “cruise liner”; however, it implies that it is the church institution that does most of the fighting. The role of church members is to pay the pastors to find the targets and fire the guns each week as they gather to watch. They see the programs, services, and ministries of the church as the primary instruments of mission.
 - 4) Greear suggests a third metaphor for the church: *aircraft carrier*. Like battleships, aircraft carriers engage in battle, but not in the same way. Aircraft carriers equip planes to carry the battle elsewhere. Loading people up and launching them into their ministry.
 - 5) This is more in line with Eph 4:12: The role of vocational ministry staff is, *“equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.”* -- Ephesians 4:12
- g. This is why so many people have become so board with church. There has to be more than simply coming and listening.
 - h. The church does not need more programs, what it need is more people who take ownership of the mission and move from consumers to contributors and who will step into the rubble and say, “I’m going to be part of the mission of God.”
 - i. The people who jumped in to re-build the wall are normal people who discovered that God was up to something and they wanted to bring what they had to the table and contribute.

2. When people are on mission with God there will ALWAYS be opposition.

- a. Last week we identified a repeating pattern in chapter two...The text tells us (twice) that opposition comes when the *“good hand of God is upon us”* (2:8) and when we put our hands *“to the good work”* (2:18).
- b. There are three forms of opposition listed in chapter four:
 - 1) Outright ridicule and taunting that leads to demoralization (4:1-5).

- a) We see this in the secular culture – there are those who are simply entrenched against the plans and purposes of God (although we do bring a lot of it on ourselves).
 - b) But this is why many of you have chosen to homeschool.
- 2) Personal discouragement. “...*We ourselves are unable to rebuild the wall.*” --Nehemiah 4:10
- a) Fear and the lingering rubble in our own lives...we have gotten used to living with rubble in our own lives. Things like pride, depression, anger, lust, fear, materialism, medicating our pain in various ways, and discouragement. We get used to our own inconsistencies. It's a little bit like the hoarder...
 - b) There have been several famous preachers over the years that have suffered from severe depression. One is D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, a medical doctor who became a pastor in London in the mid-twentieth century.
 - i. Here's what he wrote in his book *Spiritual Depression*: “Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself?” --D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones
 - ii. Then he quotes from Psalm 42: “*Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him for the help of His presence. 6 O my God, my soul is in despair within me; therefore I remember You...*” --Psalms 42:5-6
 - iii. Lloyd-Jones says of the psalmist: “His soul had been repressing him, crushing him. So he stands up and says: ‘Self, listen for a moment, I will speak to you.’”³
- 3) Friendly fire. Look at 4:12: “*At that time the Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said to us ten times, ‘You must return to us.’*” --Nehemiah 4:12 (ESV)
- a) The good news is that this is most likely how Nehemiah and the other leaders heard about the plot of the surrounding enemies.

³ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cures*, Eerdmans 1965: 20-21.

- b) The bad news is that even their own people were seeking to discourage them from re-building the wall and the gates.
- c) While this can be a sub-set of personal discouragement, it often comes from our friends and family...

3. The RESPONSE to opposition is a rhythm of prayer, strategic planning, strong and decisive leadership, and attentiveness.

- a. We have seen the rhythm of prayer throughout Nehemiah's narrative – and it comes into play again in vs. 4-5 and then again in v. 9:
 - 1) V. 4: *"Hear, O our God, how we are despised! Return their reproach on their own heads and give them up for plunder in a land of captivity. ⁵ Do not forgive their iniquity and let not their sin be blotted out before You, for they have demoralized the builders" -- Nehemiah 4:4-5*
 - 2) (We see something in vs. 4-5 that show up throughout the Bible. There are prayers, mostly in the Psalms, that appear to contain curses or call for the punishment of the writer's (or God's) enemies. These are called "imprecatory prayers"⁴ Biblically speaking, we are to live in the tension of calling out for God's judgment and also loving our enemies.)
 - 3) V. 9: *"But we prayed to our God."* --Nehemiah 4:9 [rhythm of prayer]
- b. We see the effect of Nehemiah's strategic planning in v. 13 and vs. 16-20:
 - 1) V. 13: *"Then I stationed men in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, the exposed places, and I stationed the people in families with their swords, spears and bows." --Nehemiah 4:13 [again, leadership genius]*
 - 2) Vs. 16-20: *"From that day on, half of my servants carried on the work while half of them held the spears, the shields, the bows and the breastplates; and the captains were behind the whole house of Judah. ¹⁷ Those who were rebuilding the wall and those who carried burdens took their load with one hand doing the work and the other holding a weapon. ¹⁸ As for the builders, each wore his sword girded at his side as he built, while the trumpeter stood near me. ¹⁹ I said to*

⁴ See the [Pastor's Blog](#) for a more in-depth description.

the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, 'The work is great and extensive, and we are separated on the wall far from one another. ²⁰ At whatever place you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us.'" --Nehemiah 4:16-20

- 3) Last week we saw that prayer and planning are not at odds with each other. Nehemiah models for us the biblical balance of waiting on God in prayer as well as strategic thinking and strategic planning.
 - 4) Nehemiah models for us the combination of the best qualities of Mary with the best qualities of Martha (see Luke 10:38-42)
- c. We see strong and decisive leadership in v. 14: Nehemiah gathers the people and declares: *"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 houses."* --Nehemiah 4:14 (emphasis added)
 - d. We see Attentiveness in vs. 22-23: *"At that time I also said to the people, 'Let each man with his servant spend the night within Jerusalem so that they may be a guard for us by night and a laborer by day.'* ²³ *So neither I, my brothers, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us removed our clothes, each took his weapon even to the water."* --Nehemiah 4:22-23

III. CONCLUSION

A. As we close, I would like to expand on this idea of attentiveness. Attentiveness has three parts:

1. Attentiveness is being alert to the ploys of the enemy.
 - a. As Christians we all have one main enemy: *"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places."* --Ephesians 6:12 [our brother or sister is ever our enemy]
 - b. We also know that churches (all organizations) are prone to gossip, strife, negativity, and those who are mean-spirited. This refers to people who have malicious intentions, who love to complain, to hear about the discontent and struggles of others, and then repeat it as gossip when they have the opportunity.

- c. The result can be an atmosphere of distrust, and people who are hurt. This can greatly hinder the healing, the reconciliation, and restoration process. It's like continually picking at a scab...
 - 2. Attentiveness goes the extra mile to protect the people that you love.
 - a. Like Neh placed guards in the gaps of the wall day and night, we need to be willing to not allow gossip, strife, negativity, and those who are mean-spirited to undermine the work God wants to do.
 - b. It's important for all of us to be able to express our opinion, correct? Having said that, it's important that we express ourselves to the appropriate people.
 - c. I am asking you, not only to guard your own heart, but to stand guard over the hearts of those you love.
 - 3. Attentiveness listening deeply to one another with respect, courtesy, and total concentration.
 - a. We don't have to automatically agree to listen deeply with respect, courtesy, and concentration.
 - b. Attentiveness means we listen well and engage in humble and respectful dialogue – with a desire to KNOW and to DO God's will.
- B. When all is said and done we fight the enemy of discouragement by:
- 1. Joining the mission of God
 - 2. Facing the opposition
 - 3. Responding with prayer, strategic planning, strong decisive leadership, and attentiveness.

P.A.S.S. Questions For KHC Life Group Leaders (or personal study)

Sermon Dates: Feb 13-14, 2016

Sermon Title: Joining the Mission of God (Defeating Discouragement)

Sermon Passage: Nehemiah 3-4

P - Participation (get everyone involved in the dialog)

1. What are your spiritual gifts? How are you currently using them?

A - Application (makes it personal)

2. According to chapter 4, why did Nehemiah face opposition? How did he respond? How do you typically respond when you face opposition for your faith?
3. Opposition can come in various forms: personal, cultural, governmental, or institutional. In what ways have you faced opposition because you were a Christian?

S - Scripture (thinking biblically is a learned behavior! :-)

4. The devil's tactics of opposition are to scorn, threaten, distract, and/or discredit. What has been your experience? How can you turn to God when the enemy of your soul begins to "roar" (1 Peter 5:8)?
5. Why is your practice of prayer an important test that you are responding rightly to opposition? How can you grow in making prayer your "default" response?

S – Sharing (aim for a time of honest reflection, authenticity, and transparency in a safe atmosphere modeled by you). [Choose one of the following as a final dialogue question.]

6. Nehemiah's response to opposition was to keep his eyes on God and the work the Lord had given him to do. How can Nehemiah's example inform your future responses to opposition?