

## Nehemiah 6:1-19

Disunity can destroy a work, biting and devouring one another leads to consuming one another, that's the general gist of what ch 5 was all about. Internal issues amidst the people of God, and if division doesn't *destroy* the work, at the very least it *delays* the work. Because the work has to cease in order to deal *with* and seek a resolve *to* the crisis at hand. And the enemy loves it when we focus on the faults of one another because then he can take a general hiatus and focus his attention elsewhere. Which is exactly what we seen in ch 5; the whole time they were dealing with the inner turmoil of disunity and contention, we have no mention of the enemy attacking on the outside. Why? Because there was no need, there was no work being done, there was nothing effective towards the kingdom being accomplished. People had abandoned their place on the wall. You see the bottom line is that as long as the enemy considers you a threat (i.e. you're focused on your part on the wall, you're getting kingdom work done, your focus is outward on a hurt and dying world in desperate need of Jesus Christ) than he'll be coming against your life in some way, shape or form. Because the bottom line is that he came to steal, kill and destroy, and he'll come at you through acquaintances, manipulative circumstances, sometimes your family or even your kids. He doesn't care about your kids, if he can take you out by destroying their lives, than he gets 2 for the price of 1. But he'll also seek to goad you through your own bros and sisters in Christ, those whom have been appointed to be on the wall *beside* you, co laboring along *with* you. Whatever it takes, because if he can get you distracted *from* the work, or divided *in* the work, than at the very least he's able to *delay* the work, and perhaps he just might *destroy* the work altogether. There are people leaving the planet everyday with out Jesus, and yet we get so easily derailed from that reality, we lose focus, and focus on one another rather than what God has called us to do. That's what happened in ch 5, there was division and disunity *inwardly* so the work came to an end *temporarily*. But Nehemiah was blessed *by* God with wisdom *from* God, got the issues worked out and the people returned to their work on the wall.

So what takes place in ch 6? As soon as the *work resumes*, the *resistance returns*.

Vs1-2

When did the resistance re-ignite? Notice, "When our enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall." The word is *out* that the work is *on* so the enemy begins his efforts once again at bringing the work to an end. It's just a spiritual fact of life, if you're an active participant in the building up of the kingdom; you're going to draw the enemy's attention. And in certain respects therein lies a reason to rejoice because if you *never* draw the enemy's attention than perhaps he's not too worried about your position, you're not doing anything of any effect so he's find leaving you in that comfort zone. But as we've said before you're only buying the lie if you think that perhaps somehow life is *better* because you're not serving Jesus. Life doesn't get better if you're not serving Jesus, you simply grow more and more lethargic (spiritually speaking) until one day you make a lackadaisical entrance into heaven whereby you're saved as by fire but really that's about it.

There's not much more to show for your life, but we know that if God has saved us it's for a purpose that goes beyond us, He wants to use us in the building up of His kingdom.

Now we read here that though the walls had been rebuilt and there were no breaks in them, the doors and gates had yet to be hung. Translation: there's still opportunity for the enemy to get on the inside, if the work stops now, they're still not altogether fortified.

Your enemy is always looking for an opening, and if there's an area of your life that's not walled up to him, or gated before him, he'll come storming in.

Outside of that at this point the enemy feels that this is a "Now or never" type situation, "If we don't get this work stopped now, they'll get the *security*, that sense of peace and freedom to worship God that they've been looking for *personally*."

And so the enemy seeks to use the art of subtlety 1<sup>st</sup>, "What do you say we get together out in the villages of the plain of Ono, in the house of Yoko." And the way this phrase is couched it's as if they're offering some sort of peace treaty, or they're looking for a conference of sorts, "Let's hook up and hash things out." But notice Nehemiah says, "But they sought to do me harm." What's this saying? That Nehemiah was able to *discern* their intent to bring him down. Alan Redpath make the comment to the effect of whether you're a pastor or a teacher, an evangelist, Sunday school leader or whatever, that you should be aware of the fact that there will always be those who are friendly to your face who are planning your downfall behind your back. And how the Christian who's always fawning and flattering you is often time the 1<sup>st</sup> to rejoice when you fall, Nehemiah was equipped with *discernment*.

What is discernment? It's the ability to observe, have insight into, or perceive *inward intent* as opposed to *outward appearance*. We might understand it as the ability to see a situation for the way God sees it as opposed to the way it appears in the natural. We're often deceived by the outward appearance of a matter. Remember this vs? "...*the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.*" 1 Sam 16:7 Now discerning a situation isn't always a negative thing, it sees the good in a situation where sometimes people miss it just as it sometimes sees the bad in a situation where others might miss it.

How is it that we develop this ability to discern? One way is through studying and knowing the word of God. The bible tells us, "...*the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*" Heb 4:12 Another way to understand that would be to say that if a certain scenario does not run true to the totality of the counsel of the Word of God, then I can reject as being from God, or ok with God.

These guys have been in open opposition towards Nehemiah pretty much from the beginning, now they're all the sudden buttering up to him, wanting to have a meeting with him. Maybe the Lord quickened him with the scripture, "*Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.*" Prov 27:6 A contemplation of that vs alone would be enough to make him question their motives. "You guys have stood against me and this work from day 1, now that we're just about finished you're suddenly wanting to hook up with me 20 miles outside the city to talk things over?" This doesn't smell right, smells more like opportunity for ambush or assassination than it does peace talks and reconciliation.

Directly tied to that is simple time and spiritual maturity, Heb 5:12-14 tells us that discernment is something that spiritual babes just generally don't have. How many babies are drawn to the dangerous things for their lives? Electrical outlets, hot stoves or furnaces, or they'll put anything in their mouth, they just seem to be innately drawn towards destructive things. But through time maturity and by reason of experience they learn what's good for them and what hurts when I grab hold of it. As you grow in Christ, seek the Lord through prayer and in His Word, you learn through time and practical experience certain things that'll hurt you if you grab hold of it, or get entangled in it, or for some reason associate yourself with it.

And finally the Holy Spirit can as He wills simply endow you supernaturally in your time of need to see the heart of a situation because of no reason with in yourself, its just a gift from Him. How we need to pray for the ability to discern good from evil, the edifying from those things that would defile or destroy us.

Vs3

Along with discernment what are we seeing here? "Determination" any good leader needs a solid sense of determination. And one of the things that I would have you glean from these vs (2-3) is this combination of discernment and determination kept him from *distraction*. The enemy was seeking to distract him from the work, Nehemiah said, "Oh no, not going there, God has entrusted to me a work here and I will not be moved." Listen, the enemy will seek to distract you from the work as well, don't go there, if God is doing a great work in you "here" (in a certain area of your life) don't be brought down that the work should cease, don't go "there." (To that place that distracts you from the work, that causes that work that God has entrusted to you to cease). Because if the enemy can distract you he in essence has won the victory *over* you, majoring on minors and minoring on majors and the work is distracted, we've deviated. And notice

Vs4

So Nehemiah was persistent, 4 times they offered to meet with him, 4 times he told them, No. If it wasn't right the 1<sup>st</sup> time, it won't be right the 4<sup>th</sup> time, or the 44<sup>th</sup> time. How many times we break down because of the unrelenting offers of the enemy? Over and over and over again comes the pressure, the temptation, the enticing and finally we say, "Ok, Ok, just leave me alone about it."

Nehemiah didn't do that, he was determined, he used discernment, and those things kept him focused, he knew what God had called him to do, and refused to be pulled away from that task. The idea of meeting with these people may've sounded real good, but it wasn't from God. And anytime you're in a place of spiritual leadership, you're going to be contending with all kinds of different things at any given time that might *sound good*, and they might even *be good* in and of themselves. But they're not *from God for you* at that time. It's not what He's called you to just then, discernment will give you focused, and keep you free from distraction.

Vs5-9

We've noted previously the fact that Nehemiah was a man of prayer and how God uses people of prayer. But we want to note a few things in this particular portion.

Notice 1<sup>st</sup> of all how specific attention is given to the fact that the letter that Sanballat sent was an "open letter" back in vs 5. As you know generally speaking letters were sealed if they were of significant content, or sent to a significant person. And they'd be sealed with either wax, or clay, (something to that effect) with perhaps a signet ring pressed into the wax and that would A.) make sure no one else read it, and B.) tell you who the letter was from. And if the letter was sealed it generally spoke of your respect for the person you sent it to. But if it wasn't sealed it sent the signal that you thought the person you sent it to that they were somehow beneath you and not really deserving of your respect, because it made potentially private matters public news. So this was no doubt meant to insult Nehemiah who was no doubt accustomed to the formalities of such things being a part of the king's court for so long, but also it sent him the signal that Sanballat considered him beneath himself and the subtlety is there that Sanballat wanted this news to permeate. That there were suspicions and allegations sedition here, Nehemiah establishing himself as their king, appointing prophets to affirm that and all the rest. Now it's possible that Malachi was on the scene and prophesying at this time, and one particular message he was preaching was, "*Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming, Says the LORD of hosts.*" Mal 3:1. And so it's possible that Sanballat intentionally twisted that message to purport that Nehemiah was claiming to be that Messenger, the One whom the Lord had sent. And even though the letter is written in such a way as to say, "We just want to vindicate you."

The reality is that he's instigating underhanded slander, "This is what others have said, it's being reported and rumored, and so we really just want to clarify the matter." But there's also a threat tucked away nice and neat in there, "Now these matters will be reported to the king." and The last thing they wanted was for the king to think they were seeking to establish themselves in such a way as to rebel against him. And this no doubt enraged Nehemiah to a certain degree because these are the very things that he'd worked so hard to be above board in. He'd secured the favor of the king, he'd never taken salary or used his position to profit off the people. And now he's being accused of both seeking to rebel *against* the king, and exalting himself to be the king *over* the people.

But we need to notice how he handled the false reports and personal slander. Did he make an elaborate case, gather facts and evidence against the accusations and go before the people to clarify the issue point by point? No, he just said, “You’re a liar” *prayed* to God for strength to carry on and *pressed* on in the work trusting that his godly character before the people would be enough to supercede the false reports by anyone genuinely concerned for the facts.

This might surprise you guys but every now and then someone doesn’t agree with me. And sometimes it’s such to the extent that they’ll send an ugly letter or e-mail to me. And on an occasion they’ll even send duplicate copies to Calvary Costa Mesa wanting Pastor Chuck to know how awful I am, or what a truly self centered agenda I serve. And often times I don’t know who else they’ve spoken to, or where the “open letter” has been sent. But I’ve learned by reason and experience that it just doesn’t pay to try and defend yourself, better to just cry out to God, pray for the strength to carry on and keep on pressing on.

Because the enemy would love nothing more than to derail God’s purpose for my life by sidetracking me with issue after issue that I need to set straight or vindicate. But I’ve found that God does a much better job of being my defense than I do, if I want to defend myself, God will let me. But I can’t think of a time that that was really fruitful, however if I keep focused on Christ, and what He’s called me to do, God always has a way of working it out. And sometimes that’s a hard route, because other people are saying things, you look like a jerk or whatever, but you just have to trust the Lord for the ultimate end result. And that even if you’re labeled a certain way for all the time you have on this earth in the eyes of a certain person or group of people or whatever, in the end when we see God face to face it’ll all be made clear. Maybe they were right, and you really blew life, the main thing you’re concerned with is that before God you’ve sought to be right with Him, and pleasing to Him as opposed to being a man pleaser and always looking good in the sight of man. I’m often encouraged by Ps 26 in such times and encourage others to take it to heart when they’re being wrongly accused. Because you start defending yourself and suddenly you appear to have something to defend, best just to focus *on* the Lord, stay true *to* the Lord and let Him work it out. You take care of your character, and trust God to take care of your reputation. Because generally speaking people who are genuinely concerned for the facts are able to evaluate the fruit of a matter, and those looking for an excuse to be mad at you or to turn away from you are going to find it sooner or later anyway. So pray about it, be brief (at best) concerning it and let the Lord vindicate you. You don’t have the strength to suck it up and move on in and of yourself, maybe once, or twice, or for a short season but eventually you’ll fold, we need God to strengthen our hands, not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit says the Lord of Hosts.

Vs10-14

The overall gist, we seem to quote it a lot around here, *“The fear of man brings a snare, But whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe.”* Prov 29:25 Nehemiah had a true shepherds heart, Jesus said, *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep.”* John 10:11-13. Had Nehemiah been in this for personal profit than when he thought there might be danger on the trail, he’d of tucked tail and ran. But because he shared the heart of God, for the people of God and the work of God he wasn’t going to be intimidated from the work.

Now exactly why he went to visit this particular Shemaiah we don’t know, perhaps he’d considered him a friend up to that point, but unfortunately he was a mercenary. A hired gun, sold out to the highest bidder, and he played the part of a prophet (which made him a false prophet). He told Nehemiah that the Lord had given him the insight that people were coming to kill him that night but that he could find a safe haven in the sanctuary. And once again Nehemiah’s red flags started waving, he was like, *“Why would God commit this work to me and then tell me to abandon ship and leave the people hung out to dry?”* Not only that Nehemiah knew that it was forbidden for anyone other than the priesthood to enter into temple. God’s Word said, *“So you shall appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall attend to their priesthood; but the outsider who comes near shall be put to death.”* Num 3:10. And that’s not the only passage in which the warning is made clear, you may recall Uzziah entered the temple and was struck with Leprosy. And one thing we know about God is that never under any circumstances will He go against the counsel of His own word. So Nehemiah is standing there listening to this guy and he’s telling him to in essence abandon the work and ignore God’s written word. So he immediately concludes he’s nothing more than a pawn in the enemy’s hand, because if he abandons the people they’ll lose confidence in him, and if he goes into the temple, at the very least he’ll have violated God’s Word before the people thereby undermining his integrity.

And we read in vs 14 that there was apparently a # of them that were saying like things to him, seeking to confirm one another’s words. This was a conspiracy, shaky and unsettled ground for him to tread because the Jews had great respect for their prophets, and when you began to defy their word, eyes would turn toward you and people would be watching you. Yet Nehemiah stood firm in his course, he was resolute in his commitment to the Lord.

Vs15

These walls had been in shambles for over 100 yrs, and rebuilt in less than 2 months. God used Nehemiah to fix 100 yr old monumental problem in just over 2months. And it’s exciting to know that the same God sits on the throne today and He wants to use you, and me to get things done for His glory and to the benefit of the body of Christ.

And think about this, when this book began we learned that Nehemiah spent 4 months praying over the work, but the actual work was less than 2 months to completion. More time was spent praying *over* it, than working *on* it. What's that tell you? That the spiritual battle is greater and needs our attention more than the physical material struggles that we face. As difficult of a task as this was, Nehemiah dedicated more prayer time to it personally, than actual physical labor practically (himself). Pretty amazing when you think about it.

Vs16

Now that's the goal we're all looking for isn't it? Jesus said, "*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*" Matt 5:16 What a great testimony to have, that when it's all said and done, the only thing can be *said* about what's been *done*, is "Look what *God* has done." Nehemiah and the nation may've supplied the *labor*, but it was *God* who did the work. And it's nice to see the enemy disheartened now and then as well.

Vs17-19

This is a little narrative to let us in on a few more of Nehemiah's sore spots, Tobiah was in cahoots with some of the nobles on the inside through marriage and family. And they'd all the time be talking trash against Nehemiah, twisting his word for ammunition for Tobiah, but they'd talk up and speak great things about Tobiah to Nehemiah. But even in this he just calls the shots for what they were, Tobiah was trying to intimidate him, but he didn't try to convince the nobles that what they were doing was wrong, or how they needed to be siding with him. He just seemed to be content (as difficult as it may've been) to let it go and let God deal with it. He remained determined to finish well the work that'd been committed to his trust. He didn't feel the need to go after Tobiah because Tobiah wasn't effectively interfering with the work. He tried, but Nehemiah by the grace of God was able to keep the ball rolling.

2 Things we need to grab hold of here, #1 That before we criticize the nobles too much we make sure our own hearts are clean. That we're not in a party of somehow criticizing, or somehow perhaps even inadvertently going against the grain of what God is wanting to do because of a certain influence in our lives that's *persuading* us rather than God's Word *leading* us. And #2 If we're perhaps the one being criticized or ridiculed that we let God be our defense, and not let it distract us from the work.

There's kind of a neat little progression that brings us to this point in the phrases that Nehemiah uses that begin with the word "So." And it looks sort of like this, "*So I prayed to the God of heaven.*" Neh 2:4 "*So it pleased the king to send me;*" Neh 2:6 "*So I came to Jerusalem*" Neh 2:11 "*So they said, 'Let us rise up and build.'*" Neh 2:18 "*So we built the wall,*" Neh 4:6 "*So we labored in the work*" Neh 4:21 "*So the wall was finished*" Neh 6:15. And so we conclude that despite all the adversity, God is faithful.

Prayer Points: Lord thank You for Your faithfulness, we realize that when we do the work it means nothing to the enemy, but when You do the work the enemy is disheartened, discouraged, God we commit the work that's to be done in *our* lives to You. We'd ask that You'd do it all, and that we wouldn't touch it, on the practical side Lord were willing to labor, but when it's all said and done may it happen in such a way that people would be able to perceive that this was a work done by our God. God strengthen our hands, grant us discernment, determination, and keep us free from distraction...