

Facing Opposition

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Preacher: The Rt. Rev. Mike Hill

[0 : 0 0] well hi everybody and welcome to our online message this week i'm delighted to welcome you and this week we'll be looking at nehemiah chapter 4 you might find it helpful if you have a bible handy to look up that chapter and before i begin let's just bow our heads and pray together father we ask that you would speak to us now from your word lord would you please encourage us where we need it lord please rebuke us and lord we pray that in the power of your holy spirit my words might be life transforming words and we pray these things in jesus name so in nehemiah chapter 4 of verse 1 and the chapter in the niv is headed opposition to the rebuilding and we read in verse 1 of one of the central culprits when scripture says when sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall he became angry and was greatly incensed and i guess one of the things that is mildly troubling about the mass marketing that we've been subject to in our culture is that quite a lot of that marketing is trying to persuade us that if we buy this implement or that implement uh we can make our lives somewhat easier in fact um it's not only us i read the other day there there's somebody running a yoga class for dogs and good luck with that i would think um but here's the thing um we'd love to believe wouldn't we that anything worth having can be gained easily and yet in just about every area of life in order to make any kind of positive gain uh there is usually a cost to that uh in malachi chapter 3 and verse 3 the um malachi tells us that god is like a refiner's fire and in those days um getting gold ore through to the finished product was a heck of a process had to be processed washed and then smelted and to get rid of all the impurities and finally ultimately from a good deal of ore you were lucky if you might get a small nugget of gold and why did malachi say that because i think malachi was trying to teach us and this is reinforced a little bit in the new testament that when it comes to discipleship there is a likelihood that to make a gain we might end up feeling some pain you remember nehemiah's task was to rebuild the wall around jerusalem we said a couple of weeks ago this was not just a physical task so it certainly was that but it's also a kind of symbolic task that rebuilding the walls protected the city physically but also symbolized the protection of jewish culture and in particular uh their religious culture which in exile of course had come under serious threat well before we can understand how nehemiah dealt with this opposition um just need to note one or two things that seem evident from nehemiah's character the first being

that from verse five onwards we learned that nehemiah was a man of prayer that anything that he decided uh any plan that he had was always earthed uh in prayer to his father in heaven and that prayerfulness of course didn't just do nehemiah well it will do as well too as we battle in our discipleship in the 21st century secondly he was a man who understood his clear purpose um he knew and i guess you know reading the old testament today and we would guess that you know this is hardly rocket science that having heard that the wall of jerusalem was still uh in a demolished state it was pretty obvious that somebody needed to take on the task of rebuilding those walls and immediately that became nehemiah's purpose the third thing is he knew and in leadership terms he needed to get the situation in jerusalem from a to b and a lot of people are quite good at understanding a purpose but in our churches he seemed particularly bad at having a plan to get us from a to b but you will note in chapter two that nehemiah had a great plan to go before king artaxerxes ask his permission to go to jerusalem get protection from him get raw materials for the rebuilding of the wall the wall it was a very high risk but in the end a very good plan which meant that he could get on his way and ultimately fulfill his purpose so he's a man of um uh prayer a man with passion uh we're told in in verse four that when he heard news of the demolished wall he wept uh it was a man with a man with a man with a plan but to quote pete seager's old um protest song he as it were kept his eyes on the prize whatever came his way be that opposition from sambalat and tobias and geshem uh or be it um uh opposition from within nehemiah seemed unusually focused on the task of building this wall and as clive told us three weeks ago uh this gargantuan task was fulfilled in just 52 days so nehemiah experienced opposition on two fronts first there was external opposition from sambalat and tobias and a man with a terrifying name geshem the arab who we read about in chapter two and from the very start of nehemiah's purpose there was a massive um anxiety on sambalat and tobias and geshem's part to try and stop this at any cost how do they do that well firstly we're told that they started by uh ridiculing the jews it says that at the end of verse one sambalat he ridiculed the jews and of course um you might think that um uh you know being ridiculed is something that you don't really like i mean none of us likes to be made to feel smaller but sambalat and his colleagues went in for this

heavy duty it is interesting in the modern world how many stand-up comics um seem to start from a very strong atheist viewpoint and although they're wary about criticizing some religions they apparently have no issue in kind of going through the throat of christianity and mocking it uh absolutely mercifully and at some point you just have to kind of make a decision are you going to let this um pull you out of shape or are you going to withstand it and clearly nehemiah was not at all intimidated by this mockery he was just going to keep going and when sambalat and his colleagues discovered that mockery was not going to work was not going to put nehemiah off his stroke then there came the threat of something far more serious and far more scary and that was the threat of physical violence and this became a major issue and nehemiah had to withstand the threat of physical violence in verse 12 were told the jews who lived near them came and told them ten times over wherever you turned they that is sambalat and his colleagues will attack us again i love the way that nehemiah deals with these threats in the first thing is improving the point i made earlier nehemiah is a man of prayer so in verse four we read these words nehemiah's prayer here is our god for we are despised turn their insults back on their own heads give them over as plunder in a land of captivity i mean that's pretty in your face kind of praying isn't it you know that your enemies enemies would be plundered uh would be plundered but nevertheless nehemiah went from that and prayed that his enemies would be overturned but also you will note nehemiah didn't just deploy a spiritual strategy here but he also deployed a practical strategy verse 9 we read in the face of the physical threat and the face of the mockery um nehemiah tells us we prayed to our god and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat physical threat and physical violence so we'll post a guard the spiritual threat that these people want to stop us fulfilling our symbolic task of rebuilding the wall and nehemiah and his colleagues get on their prayers get on their knees and pray together i mean this is amazing and of course underlying all this is a characteristic of nehemiah that again shines through the book and that was he was not lacking in the kind of courage department whether it was going to um king artax xerxes with a risky request to be able to leave the exile um in susa and go to jerusalem and ask for protection and ask for materials that took nerve and when the opposition came that took nerve as well and nehemiah was not found wanting but then there's another little piece in here that i just want to draw your attention to and it's this the people in judah this is verse 10 said the strength of the laborers is giving out and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall here's a problem for nehemiah his workforce is basically coming to him and saying this task is just too much

we're exhausted leave us alone nehemiah isn't going to be intimidated intimidated by that anyway how many times in churches have i heard the lack of effort from church councils or from people excused on the basis oh people are very tired of course we're tired we all get tired kind of life we lead uh makes us tired but if tiredness pulls us out of shape then we have a problem the other thing i would say about this is that when a kind of myth begins in a community like we're too tired and we can't do this it's highly infectious it quickly kind of catches fire amongst people and becomes a real issue nehemiah was not going to be intimidated by that because he knew that his purpose needed to triumph over the opposition let me close this message by saying that um in the new testament the one thing that is pretty clear although we choose to ignore it is that jesus approach to opposition was not if it happens no rather his approach was when it happens and friends we need to bear this in mind right now i think as the ties of secularism wash against the church as we try and work out how do we get into some kind of recovery following lockdown as we face the inevitable challenges of lockdown i think we need to heed nehemiah's strategy for dealing with opposition firstly we don't need to be intimidated intimidated secondly we don't need to fear and thirdly we need to put together spiritual strategy with physical strategy what did nehemiah do he prayed to his god and deployed guards to guard the work that was being completed i think that um on a personal level is that um on a personal level of addiction is that um on a personal level of addiction is that um you know it's important that you pray about your addiction pray that god would heal you it's important that your friends in church pray for you as well but then there's some practical things that it's useful to do one is if your addiction is alcohol stay away from supermarket and the alcohol section stay away from off licenses stay away from bars if prescription drugs are your problem tell your doctor that if non-prescription drugs are your drugs are your problem stay away from dealers and these kind of people oftentimes on a personal level putting together spiritual and practical strategy will help us claim victory nehemiah teaches us one very likely if a work is spiritual either individually or in our churches there will be opposition two we shouldn't shirk opposition or kind of go home with our bat

ball and stumps but we should stand there stand against it the third thing is we should be spiritual in our approach the whole issue of ephesians chapter 6 remember that amazing chapter about the the weapons that god has given us to fight spiritual warfare with the implication of that chapter is don't fight um spiritual battles with worldly strategies no fight spiritual battles with the spiritual weaponry that god has provided you for the purpose of that we should be spiritual in ephesians chapter 6 so we will be praying against opposition we pray for bold plans in our church and in our lives in order that we might see the church in our time get into some kind of recovery on a personal level whatever your struggle is right now wherever the opposition is coming to you remember this that um god wants you to overcome and he will supply the resources for you to overcome but you need to show him that you are intentional about overcoming and the final thing is this opposition needs to be dealt with we just turn our backs on it then the strength of that opposition on a church front on a personal front will just increase in velocity and make it harder for you and me to claim the victory the amazing thing about the gospel is in the end it shows us that jesus triumphed over the most incredible evil the most terrible opposition on the cross of calvary and the great news for christians is that we're not fighting for victory but we're fighting from victory friends god bless you have a good week and amen you