

Mission accomplished

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[0 : 0 0] Nehemiah chapter 6 verse 1. Now when Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem, the Arab, and the rest of our enemies heard that I had built the wall and that there was no breach left in it, although up to that time I had not set up the doors in the gates, Sanballat and Geshem sent to me saying, Come and let us meet together at Haqafarim in the plain of Ono.

But they intended to do me harm and I sent messengers to them saying, I am doing a great work and I cannot come down to you. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?

And they sent to me four times in this way and I answered them in the same manner. In the same way Sanballat for the fifth time sent his servant to me with an open letter in his hand.

In it was written, It is reported among the nations, and Geshem also says it, that you and the Jews intend to rebel.

That is why you are building the wall. And according to these reports you wish to become their king. And you have also set up prophets to proclaim concerning you in Jerusalem, There is a king in Judah.

[1 : 2 0] And now the king will hear of these reports. So now come and let us take counsel together. Then I sent to him saying, No such things as you say have been done, for you are inventing them out of your own mind.

For they all wanted to frighten us, thinking their hands will drop from their work, it will not be done. But now, O God, strengthen my hands. Now when I went into the house of Shemaiah, the son of Deliah, the son of Mehetabel, who was confined to his home, he said, Let us meet together in the house of God within the temple.

Let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you. They are coming to kill you by night. But I said, Should such a man as I run away?

And what man such as I could go into the temple and live? I will not go in. And I understood and saw that God had not sent him, but he had pronounced the prophecy against me, because Tobiah and Samballot had hired him.

For this purpose he was hired, that I should be afraid and act in this way and sin, and so they could give me a bad name in order to taunt me. Remember Tobiah and Samballot, O my God, according to these things that they did, and also the prophetess, Noah Dyer, and the rest of the prophets who wanted to make me afraid.

[2 : 4 4] So the war was finished on the 25th day of the month, Elul, in 52 days. And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid, and fell greatly in their own esteem, for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.

Moreover, in those days, the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them. For many in Judah were bound by oath to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shekhaniah, the son of Eirah, and his son, Jehoaham, had taken the daughter of Mesulam, the son of Berechiah, as his wife.

Also they spoke of his good deeds in my presence, and reported my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to make me afraid. Now when the wall had been built, and I had set up the doors and the gatekeepers, the singers and the Levites had been appointed, I gave my brother, Hananiah and Hananiah, the governor of the castle, charge over Jerusalem, for he was a more faithful and God-fearing man than many.

And I said to them, Let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot. And while they are still standing guard, let them shut and bar the doors. Appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, some at their guard posts, and some in front of their own homes.

The city was wide and large, but the people within it were few, and no houses had been rebuilt. Well, good morning, everyone.

[4 : 20] I think you'll find it a help to turn back to page 479 in the church Bibles. Just to flag up, we're looking at all of chapters 6 and 7 this morning, but we only read up to verse 4 of chapter 7.

I'm sure Andrea was relieved about that, because it's quite a long chapter with plenty of difficult names, but we will be looking at both chapters together. Shall I lead us in prayer as we prepare to do that? Some words of the Lord Jesus at the end of Luke's Gospel.

Then Jesus said to his apostles, These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled.

Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and said to them, Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

Father, we pray that as we look at those same scriptures that Jesus opened up to the apostles that morning, that you would help us to understand more about why it was that the Christ needed to suffer and rise, and also what our part is in seeking to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations.

[5 : 40] And we ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen. Earlier this year, the House of Commons debated whether to introduce an English national anthem.

If such an anthem were introduced, one of the leading contenders, already the unofficial anthem of the England cricket team, of course, would be Jerusalem. As you'll know, it's a rousing hymn, which imagines Jesus setting his feet on English soil.

But William Blake, its author, seems also to have been conveying a political message too, as his lyrics ponder, building Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land.

Now, of course, as rousing as the tune might be, much of the song is baloney from a biblical point of view. Jesus never came to England, and our job as Christians isn't to build God's kingdom on earth, or to turn England into a modern-day version of ancient Israel.

And yet, the Bible's clear that God is nonetheless in the business of building a new Jerusalem, and he wants us to play a part in it.

[6 : 54] Over the last few weeks, we've been looking together at the opening chapters of this book of Nehemiah. It's a book set right at the end of Old Testament history, and it describes the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem and the renewal of its people under the leadership of Nehemiah.

And time and again, we've seen how the book points forward, or like so much of the Old Testament, is a giant visual aid of the greater building project that God is now undertaking, the building of his church, of the new heavenly Jerusalem we meet in the book of Revelation, which will be made up of all God's people.

So we've been seeing how Nehemiah is a book which teaches us valuable lessons concerning how God's church will be built, what part we're to play, and what ought to motivate us to engage in that work.

This morning, we reach a key milestone in the book as the work of rebuilding the city walls is completed. And yet we'll see that once again, that was no easy task.

Indeed, we learn that God's people can expect fierce opposition as they go about his work. And that's the first of three things I want us to notice together this morning. God's work will face constant attack.

[8 : 14] God's work will face constant attack. And we'll spend a large amount of time on this first heading. Now, this is a theme that we've noticed several times already in Nehemiah.

We've met opposition before, especially in chapter 2 and chapter 4. And we might be tempted to think that we don't need to cover the same ground again this morning, that further warnings about opposition and enemies of the gospel will just make us depressed or paranoid or sound unnecessarily hardline.

But presumably, if Nehemiah felt it necessary to record it again here in chapter 6, then it's important that we also recognize it again. Sometimes we need to keep hearing the same things repeated.

In fact, almost every New Testament letter was, of course, written to counter some kind of opposition to the gospel. And God's people are under attack throughout the Old Testament. Indeed, the recurring theme of opposition in Nehemiah reminds us that opposition to the gospel doesn't always go away in Christian ministry.

In fact, it often intensifies. Last week, we saw that the rebuilding of Jerusalem here in Nehemiah was in danger of being derailed by internal divisions within God's people.

[9 : 32] The row over food parallels the similar divisions that arise in Acts chapter 6 in the New Testament when the growth of the early church came under threat because of arguments between Christians over the distribution of food.

And actually, it struck me as we've been studying Nehemiah how many parallels there are between Nehemiah and the book of Acts. Both record God's building projects, a literal building project in Nehemiah, and the building of the church in the book of Acts.

One of the features of Acts, you may know, is how it records a series of different obstacles to the advance of the gospel which the church met in its earliest days. And those obstacles in Acts seem almost to alternate between external threats, like persecution or distraction, and internal threats, such as disunity, false teaching, and unchecked sin.

And it's the same in Nehemiah. Nehemiah's plans come under constant attack, both from within, as we saw last week, and from without, as we see again here in chapter 6.

So have a look down with me at verse 1. Now when Sambalat and Tobiah and Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies heard that I had built the wall and that there was no breach left in it, although up to that time I had not set up the doors and the gates, Sambalat and Geshem sent to me saying, Come and let us meet together at Hakafirim in the plain of Ono.

[11 : 09] But they intended to do me harm. You'll remember we've met Sambalat, Tobiah, and Geshem before. Their earlier attempts to thwart the building work had failed.

And so at the start of chapter 6, they launch one desperate final assault as they realise Nehemiah's plan is almost complete. They invite him to join them for a meeting in the plain of Ono.

Sounds so reasonable, doesn't it? But Nehemiah was wise to their schemes and says, Oh no to Ono. Sorry.

It seems that he was probably being drawn into some kind of kidnapping plot by luring him away from Jerusalem. Or perhaps his enemies simply hoped to move in to interfere with the work in Jerusalem while Nehemiah was away.

Well, Nehemiah resists. But his enemies persevere. Four times they invite him to join them, hoping to wear him down.

[12 : 15] And then in verse 5, they up the ante. Have a look. In the same way, Sambalat, For the fifth time, sent his servant to me with an open letter in his hand.

In it was written, It is reported among the nations, and Geshem also says it, that you and the Jews intend to rebel. That is why you are building the wall. And according to these reports, you wish to become their king.

And you have also set up prophets to proclaim concerning you in Jerusalem, there is a king in Judah. And now, the king will hear of these reports. So now, come and let us take counsel together.

Do you see what is going on here? Sambalat and his sidekicks, manufactured, trumped up charges against Nehemiah, in the hope of forcing him to meet them.

And they are so sneaky, aren't they? Their charges sound plausible. Perhaps the king, fearing a coup, would believe Nehemiah was trying to rebel. After all, he had insisted on going and building this wall.

[13 : 21] And this is what we can expect if we get involved in the building of Jerusalem, whether it's Old Testament walls or the people of the New Jerusalem.

Threats, lies, and intimidation. God's city, God's work, will face constant attack. And of course, it's not hard to spot the parallels here with Jesus.

This is one of a number of occasions in the book where Nehemiah is perhaps a type or foreshadowing of the Lord Jesus, in that both come from a faraway country to Jerusalem to rescue God's people, renew their covenant with God, and as we'll see later in the book, purify the temple.

Like Nehemiah, Jesus was falsely accused at his trial of trying to launch a rebellion or seeking to set up a kingdom in this world.

Jesus also faced lies and intimidation in Jerusalem. And we must expect the same too. One of my great heroes is a man called Charles Simeon, who was vicar of Holy Trinity Church in Cambridge in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

[14 : 43] Simeon trained countless men for gospel work in England and overseas and was largely responsible for the reintroduction of expository preaching in the church. But he faced enormous opposition.

He'd been an undergraduate at Cambridge University and remained a fellow of King's College. In his early days as a vicar in the city, he was despised by the university hierarchy for his biblical convictions.

He sought to preach the gospel to students at the university and soon met some success. So the alarmed university authorities introduced a new Sunday Greek lecture to coincide with Simeon's service to make it impossible for students to attend.

And they spread false rumors that he was a bad man who was only pretending to be pious. Faithful gospel ministry will be opposed.

Many of you will know far more about this than I do, but my understanding is that we at Grace Church experienced perhaps something of this kind of thing when our church was first planted. There were those who wanted to make it very difficult for a Bible-teaching Anglican church to be established in Dulwich.

[15 : 56] And so gospel work came under attack from different sides. And once again, that's precisely what we see here in Nehemiah 6.

Because notice yet again that the opposition to Nehemiah didn't simply come from outside, but also from a fifth column within. Satan is a wily character who loves to masquerade as an angel of light, we're told.

So it shouldn't surprise us that he uses those within God's people to obstruct God's work. Let's read on from verse 10. Nehemiah tells us, Now when I went into the house of Shemaiah, the son of Deliah, son of Mehetabel, who was confined to his home, he said, Let us meet together in the house of God within the temple.

Let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you. They are coming to kill you by night. But I said, Should such a man as I run away? And what man such as I could go into the temple and live?

I will not go in. And I understood and saw that God had not sent him, but he had pronounced the prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. For this purpose he was hired, that I should be afraid and act in this way and sin.

[17 : 14] And so they could give me a bad name in order to taunt me. Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, according to these things that they did, and also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who wanted to make me afraid.

Now this is a particularly shocking incident because what's going on here is that a prophet, under the pretense of being concerned for Nehemiah's welfare, is urging him to abandon the building of the walls, to run away, and seek refuge in the inner parts of the temple.

Something only priests were entitled to do. So this man, Shemaiah, was not only encouraging Nehemiah to abandon the building work, but also to commit sin, thereby seeking to blacken his reputation, as the Cambridge University hierarchy sought to do with Charles Simeon.

And in verse 14, we learn that other prophets were doing the same in Nehemiah's day. The religious establishment were colluding with the hostile secular authorities to oppose one of their own.

Charles Simeon, in fact, faced greater opposition in his early days in Cambridge from within the church than he did even from the university. His parishioners fiercely objected to his appointment and refused to let him preach at their evening service for 12 years.

[18 : 38] They couldn't block his right to preach in the morning, so they locked the pews to make it impossible for people to sit in them. Like Nehemiah, he faced antagonism from within and without.

So opposition came to Nehemiah from all sides. And were then given a third insight into this opposition in verses 18 and 19.

Just look on with me to verse 18 this time. Moreover, in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah and Tobiah's letters came to them.

For many in Judah were bound by oath to him because he was the son-in-law of Shekeniah, the son of Arar. And his son, Johanan, had taken the daughter of Meshulam, the son of Berechiah, as his wife.

Also, they spoke of his good deeds in my presence and reported my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to make me afraid. So we can add some of the nobles of Jerusalem as well as prophets and foreign leaders to the list of enemies Nehemiah faced.

[19 : 47] These nobles were closely connected to Tobiah and it seems they were more concerned with their membership of and standing among the establishment than they were to their loyalty to God's work and God's leader.

It's scandalous and yet it's the kind of cronyism that is all too common today. Even amongst the church hierarchy sadly. And yet again, it's just what Jesus experienced, isn't it?

Do you remember the early church's prayer in Acts chapter 4 when they also were facing opposition? They prayed, in this city, Jerusalem, the same city Nehemiah rebuilt, they were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel.

Different groups, including members of God's people, working together to oppose God's work and God's leader. God's work will face constant attack.

Now, I don't know about you, but under the kind of pressure Nehemiah experienced and with so many discouragements, I would have found it very difficult to persevere.

[21 : 03] But Nehemiah kept going. And given that passages like this are included in the Bible to teach us what we can expect if we're to be engaged in God's work, we would do well to notice what it was that kept him going.

Look at his bold response to Sam Ballard's messenger back in verse 8. He says to him, No such things as you say have been done, for you are inventing them out of your own mind.

For they all wanted to frighten us, thinking their hands will drop from the work and it will not be done. But now, O God, strengthen my hands. Nehemiah realized that the one thing his enemies wanted was for him to stop building.

And so he prayed for strength to carry on. O God, strengthen my hands. He prays again in verse 14 actually. In fact, as we've seen, hardly a chapter goes by in the first half of Nehemiah without him praying.

So these verses teach us that God's work will face constant attack, both from within and without. And that the thing our opponents want is for us to stop building, perhaps to sidetrack us by steering us towards more respectable worldly concerns, or to silence us out of fear.

[22 : 26] In our case, this will mean they'll want us to stop building the church by preaching the gospel, to cause us to privatize our faith, to stay quiet, not to rock the boat just as those nobles didn't want the boat to be rocked in their cushy world.

I guess in a place like Dulwich and with the backgrounds and careers that many of us enjoy, the temptation to be like those nobles, to want to be well-liked by the establishment, to be perhaps slightly ashamed of apparent fanatics like Nehemiah will be great.

George Whitefield, the great evangelist of the 18th century who was responsible for the conversion of thousands but opposed by both the church hierarchy and secular authorities, once said, if you are going to walk with Jesus Christ, you are going to be opposed.

In our days, to be a true Christian is really to become a scandal. Well, we could say the same today, couldn't we? We can't expect to be faithful to Jesus and beloved by the world, but we can expect constant attack.

And yet, it's not all doom and gloom because these verses teach us how we can stand firm. Like Nehemiah, we're to pray for God's strength and we're to remember how the story ends and that leads us on to our second heading.

[23 : 56] God's work will face constant attack but secondly and more briefly, God's city will be built. God's city will be built. Rather than a lashing out at his enemies, in verse 14, Nehemiah entrusts the judgment of his opponents to God, a reminder that we can take heart, that justice will be done eventually and we will be vindicated.

And then we're told in verse 15, So the wall was finished on the 25th day of the month Elul in 52 days. And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.

It's recorded in almost a matter-of-fact way but in just 52 days, despite multiple setbacks and fierce opposition, Nehemiah had completed his task.

It was a great triumph. Archaeologists have actually discovered parts of Nehemiah's wall, a reminder to us that what we're dealing with here is history.

Interestingly, the wall was 2.75 metres wide and has the appearance of being built by amateurs in a hurry rather than professional stonemasons. But it was enough to cause the surrounding nations and Israel's enemies to tremble.

[25 : 23] It was a great triumph against all odds. And the reason for the unlikely triumph is stated in verse 16 if you just look down right at the end of that verse.

For they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God. No other explanation could be given for how Nehemiah had managed to succeed.

God's city will be built because no one can thwart God's plans. And you see, this was what kept Nehemiah going.

This confidence that God would accomplish his work. I suspect that he was just as fearful about the threats he received and as tempted to give up as we would have been. Do you remember how we're told in chapter 1 that he was very much afraid when he approached the king?

He was no different from us. He wasn't some kind of superhuman. It's just that for all his human frailty he persevered because he knew God would accomplish the work he'd promised to do.

[26 : 29] Nehemiah so easily have been distracted from the task of building by worldly concerns such as those in chapter 5 or deterred by oppositions like that in chapter 6.

But despite the smear campaigns and the enemy within God's promises kept him at it. And verses like verse 15 are recorded to give us as New Testament believers confidence that we too can persevere that the building project we're involved in will also be successful.

As we've noted several times already in this series Jesus promises that he will build his church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. What an encouragement to persevere even amidst opposition when we remember God's promises are certain.

Now one of the challenges when preaching through a book like Nehemiah is to decide at what point in the series to draw attention to particular links that we find elsewhere in the Bible that help us to understand how the book in question fits into the wider biblical picture.

And while we've talked a lot in this series about how the New Testament describes the church as the new Israel and pictures the advance of the gospel as a building project there's actually a place where the walls of Jerusalem themselves reappear.

[27 : 53] I wonder if you've realized that. Just turn on with me if you would to Revelation chapter 21 right at the end of the Bible. Revelation chapter 21. second last chapter of the Bible page 1251.

And you'll see from the ESV heading just before verse 9 that the new Jerusalem is being described here. And John the writer if you look down tells us in verse 12 that it had a great high wall.

In verse 14 we learn that the walls foundations of the new Jerusalem have the names of the apostles inscribed on them making the point I guess that it's through believing the apostolic gospel that one enters the city.

The walls are then measured in verse 17 and in verse 19 we're told that their foundations were made out of precious jewels which echo a description of the garden of Eden elsewhere in the Bible.

So do you see that God has promised one day to build a greater Jerusalem with greater walls. This is where history is heading.

[29 : 20] God's city his heavenly city his new Jerusalem will be built just as his old Jerusalem was. so let's get building we're on the winning side let's proclaim the gospel and pray with confidence knowing that God's church will be established.

And that leads us on to our third and final heading this morning before we finish. God's city must be populated. God's city must be populated. One might have been forgiven for thinking that the book of Nehemiah would end shortly after chapter six.

After all the wall is now complete. But from chapter seven onwards we get a change of focus a shift from the rebuilding of the wall to the renewal of the people.

Because just as Revelation 21 ends with a description of the nations entering the heavenly Jerusalem so Nehemiah's primary concern is not with bricks and mortar but with the people who he longed to enter that city.

God's city must be populated. That was Nehemiah's real concern now that the city walls were complete. Let's read from verse one of chapter seven.

[30 : 37] Now when the wall had been built and I had set up the doors and the gatekeepers the singers and the Levites had been appointed I gave my brother Hanani and Hananiah the governor of the castle charge over Jerusalem for he was a more faithful and God fearing man than many.

And I said to them let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot. And while they are still standing guard let them shut and bar the doors. Appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem some at their guard posts and some in front of their own homes.

The city was wide and large but the people within it were few and no houses had been rebuilt. The walls have been built but Nehemiah is far from finished because the city had few homes and few inhabitants.

And this clearly troubled Nehemiah greatly given the importance of Jerusalem as the city where God symbolically dwelled. And so what follows in the rest of chapter seven is the beginning of Nehemiah's attempt to repopulate the city.

Verse five Then my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles and the officials and the people to be enrolled by genealogy. And I found the book of the genealogy of those who came up at the first and I found written in it and on it goes.

[31 : 59] Now the rest of Nehemiah seven is really a rerun of Ezra chapter two where Ezra gives us a list of those who'd returned from exile. Nehemiah is preparing in this chapter to gather the people together to address them.

And in chapter 11 we'll discover his plan to repopulate Jerusalem by asking a tenth of them to move into the city within its walls. But for now let's not miss the point of Nehemiah's desire to do that and of this long list of names in chapter seven and elsewhere.

They remind us that God's city needs filling and that God knows his people by name. If you like chapter seven looks forward to the names of those who will be part of the heavenly Jerusalem.

And the question for us is whether we have the same desire for God's city to be inhabited as Nehemiah had.

Does it concern us if the residents of Jerusalem, the heavenly Jerusalem as it were, are few? Do we long to see people become inhabitants of the heavenly Jerusalem as they hear the gospel and respond to it?

[33 : 11] God will build his city. It will be a wonderful city. But as in Nehemiah, not in Nehemiah's day, not everyone will be there. And our job is to populate it through the advance of the gospel.

What a great spur that is at this time of year to invite folk to the upcoming Cayley and to the carol services and for us to persevere even amidst constant attack in boldly speaking for Christ in our workplaces and our schools.

So God's city must be populated. And yet, of course, none of us deserve to be members of that city. We get an interesting little break from the long list of names in verses 64 and 65 of chapter 7 if you just want to have a look on, where we're told that some were excluded initially from the assembly until they'd been cleansed by a priest and received the approvals of the priest.

They're described at the end of verse 64 as being unclean, a description that echoes the final verse of Revelation chapter 21 which tells us that nothing unclean will ever enter the new Jerusalem.

And those people in verses 64 and 65 are a picture of us who also by nature are unclean, undeserving of entering God's city because of our sin.

[34 : 35] But we, of course, have a greater priest who cleanses us because Jesus was led outside the city walls of Jerusalem, cut off from God's people and the place of his temple to be crucified so that we might be cleansed and be able to enjoy the refuge found within those walls.

It's what we'll be remembering as we take communion in a few moments. It's why we can enter the heavenly city. And of course, Jesus' death has made it possible for us to enter a far greater city than the earthly Jerusalem of Nehemiah's day.

Did you notice in verse 3 of Nehemiah 7 that the city gates weren't to be opened until the sun was hot, probably meaning at its hottest in the middle of the day? But in Revelation 21, we're told that the gates of the new Jerusalem will be open all the time.

They'll never be shut by day and there'll be no night. God's people will also no longer have enemies to fear. There'll be no need for guards in the heavenly Jerusalem as there were. At the beginning of Nehemiah 7.

And in Revelation, we find a city that will be fully populated with a countless multitude from every nation. The city God is building, who's populating we're to be involved in, will be a wonderful city of prosperity and peace.

[36 : 02] This Tuesday, the American people go to the ballot box. It's well known that Donald Trump wants to build a wall with Mexico to keep those who aren't rightful citizens of America from entering the country without due process.

We may well have differing views on that particular policy. But when it comes to the city walls of the new Jerusalem, none of us have any right of access.

None of us are rightful citizens. And yet, wonderfully, Jesus offers each of us legal entry through those walls into the city.

He offers us citizenship of the heavenly Jerusalem. And he invites us to populate that city with him. We started by mentioning the hymn Jerusalem.

As we said, its lyrics may be baloney from a biblical point of view. But if we remember that Jerusalem isn't to be built here on earth, its final words are, in a funny way, perhaps a good summary of Nehemiah's commitment to God's city and to the task of the task that we've been given.

[37 : 10] I will not cease from mental fight, nor shall my sword sleep in my hand, till we have built Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land.

Let's pray that in our own nation and beyond, we'd have the same commitment as Nehemiah. to building the true Jerusalem and be given strength, so to preach the gospel, whatever the cost.

Let me lead us in prayer. That prayer of Nehemiah's, but now, O God, strengthen my hands.

We thank you again, our Father, for the assurance that we can have that the heavenly Jerusalem will be built, that Jesus will build his church. And we thank you for the privilege of including us in that work of populating that city.

But we want to acknowledge that we are weak and so easily deterred by opposition, and that we are worldly and so easily distracted by other things.

[38 : 20] And so we pray with Nehemiah that you would strengthen our hands to to get on with the job of gospel proclamation, that we might have the joy of seeing the true Jerusalem built in this country and beyond.

And we ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen.