

The Rage of Man against the Work of God

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[0 : 0 0] The Yemenites and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and that the breaches were beginning to be closed. They were very angry. And they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it.

And we prayed to our God and sent a guard as a protection against them day and night. In Judah it was said, the strength of those who bear the burden is failing.

There's too much rubble. We, by ourselves, will not be able to rebuild the wall. And our enemies say, they will not know or see till we come among them and kill them and stop the work.

At that time the Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said to us ten times, you must return to us. So in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in open space places, I stationed the people by their clans with their swords, their spears and their bows.

And I looked and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to 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, your homes.

[1 : 1 3] Amen. May God bless that reading from his holy word. As we've read there of the rage of man against the work of God.

But of course, as Andy was telling us, there was never a greater rage from man against God than when Jesus was being tried and condemned and crucified.

Truly mocked, spat upon, sneered, the rage, the rage of the dying light of the world.

That rage of satanic induced hostility against the sinless Son of God bears testimony to the hatred of Satan and his forces against God.

And that rage of man that we see constantly even in the world today, that rage of man is sourced in satanic hatred against God. Of course, as we said, ultimately sin against Jesus.

[2 : 2 1] And that rage of man against God, well, it's been there since the creation of the world. The rage of Satan through the serpent tempting Adam and Eve to sin against God.

The rage of man against God. The rage of man against God seen even in the days before the flood when man lost all restraint and lived in a way that was utterly contemptible and contrary to God's word.

The rage of Pharaoh against the children of Israel in Egypt. Again, symptomatic of that rage of man against God. And so on, as we see throughout Scripture, right through the Bible, we see that rage expressed.

And Jesus declaring in John 15, verse 18, that if the world hates you, know that it's hated me before it hated you. And that hatred, that rage of man against God, we've read that in these verses in Nehemiah chapter 4.

As we continue to look at the commitment of Nehemiah and rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. As we see Nehemiah coming to bring dignity to the city.

[3 : 3 9] Coming to bring security to the city. And above all, coming to reverse the disgrace that the people of God had brought upon the name of God. And yes, if we're reading Nehemiah, we're looking at events that happened two and a half thousand years ago.

But the principles are the same. The same for us today. The lessons for us today are as relevant as they were all these years ago.

Those who are the Lord's people, you who are the Lord's people. You've been given work to do in the rebuilding of the walls of God's church. The Lord's people, you've been given tasks to perform for the glory of God.

For the glory of God's name. And what you do, you do in and through the Lord Jesus. What you do, you do in the name of the Lord Jesus, your Savior.

And because you do what you do in his name, then inevitably there will be the rage of man against you. The rage of man against the works that God has given you to do for his glory.

[5 : 05] The rage of man will not be silent. The rage of man will not cease when the name of the Lord Jesus is being proclaimed. And there in Jerusalem, there at the time of Nehemiah and the work that he was doing.

Well, the rage of man against that work, God's work, was clear. In fact, we see it in two stages in this chapter. And in a very short space of time from, as it were, phase one to phase two of that rage. You see in verses one to three, you might say phase one, if you like, when the walls have been rebuilt. There's this ridicule. There's this mockery. There's what we might call this low-level persecution.

Words that were given that were designed to bring shame and discouragement to the workers. But then when it becomes clear that these tactics that the enemies of God and his people are being exercised, the tactics aren't working, then there's another phase.

Phase two, if you like. The pace changes to one of determination to stop the work and to do it by a concerted aggression that you see in verses seven to eight.

[6 : 21] So we're going to consider really that kind of opposition before we think of the application for ourselves and how we are to respond against the rage of man, against the work of God.

Let's think, first of all, of the ridicule and mockery that we've read there from verse one to verse three. You can read it again. Well, I'll read it just now.

Maybe that might be easier. Now, when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged and jeered at the Jews. And he said in the presence of his brothers and of the army of Samaria, what are these feeble Jews doing?

Will they restore it for themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish up in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish and burned ones at that? Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him and he said, Yes, what they're building, if a fox goes up in it, he'll break down the stone wall.

This isn't the first time in the book of Nehemiah that we've read of these two individuals, Sanballat and Tobiah. You go to chapter two, verse 10, for example, and you see that they're being called displeased.

[7 : 37] They're displeased at the fact that there's someone who's come from afar, Nehemiah, to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. And then a little bit further in chapter two, when you go to verse 19, they start to jeer at Nehemiah's attempts at rebuilding.

But then that sort of amusement, that sort of low-level persecution, that becomes more sinister. And in that chapter, Sanballat and Tobiah, they start saying that, in fact, Nehemiah really is rebelling against the king of Persia.

What he's doing is rebuilding the city in order to strengthen it, to defend itself against their overlord in Persia. But that kind of attitude of, maybe you might say, irritation in chapter two becomes even more sinister when we see it in chapter four.

There's now real anger. And that's not just jeering, but there's more than just jeering. They're trying to discourage the workers. They're trying to stop the work. And even when these intimidatory tactics, when they're not working, it gets really severe.

Sanballat and Tobiah, we read they gather allies together to seek the end of the Jews in Jerusalem. You've got Sanballat in the north, in Samaria.

[9 : 01] You've got Tobiah and the Ammonites in the east. You've got Arabs in the south. You've got these people called Ashdodites, Philistines in the west. In other words, there's an encirclement of these allies against Jerusalem.

These different groups coming together, plotting together to cause so much destruction and damage to God's cause there in Jerusalem. And move forward two and a half thousand years to our current time.

Well, things really haven't much changed, have they? There's still that concerted opposition to the Lord and his work. There's still that ridicule and severe ridicule against those who are in the front line of the work of the gospel.

There's that mocking against the Lord's people in so many walks of life. Christians, the church, objects of ridicule, scorn, mockery from so many channels, so many media channels.

Christians, the butt of jokes. Christians portrayed, even as Andy was saying earlier, as soft, weak, gormless individuals. More to be pitied than admired for our faith.

[10:19] Because just as the work there in Jerusalem was open, it was evident what was happening. It was being done in the name of the Lord. So for Christians, for you who know the name of, who know the Lord Jesus, who do what you do in his name.

Your work, when it's work for the Lord, that will be open. Your voice will be heard. And you'll be seen and heard to be proclaiming the Lord Jesus. You're taking your stand for truth. And you'll be seen, therefore, to be counter-cultural. You'll be seen to be counter the established values of a secular society, of a modern nation.

And you're going to face opposition, even the kind of opposition that Nehemiah faced. And you'll be deemed a threat, a threat to all the secular values that are peddled again and again in the name of progress.

But in fact, not progress, but regress. And the opposition, the opposition to the Lord and his people is ugly. And there's that strange mixture of allies joining together on every side to damage the work of the kingdom.

[11:33] From secular humanists to liberal churchmen and women. From media outlets to educationists. From journalists to politicians.

From comedy writers to learned professors. All having that same agenda to cause as much damage as possible to the cause of the gospel.

Of course, as we said, this is Satan-induced satanic source rage. The rage of man against God. Now, yes, Satan knows that he's defeated. He knows that he's lost the battle against Christ. But he's going to carry on that war. And to seek to cause as much damage as possible.

So how do you respond? How do you respond when you're ridiculed for your faith? When you're mocked for being a follower of Jesus? When you're intimidated by all the secular and religious bullies who mock your faith?

[12:33] Who mock your stance on so many of the issues of today? How do you respond when you see all around the vast swathes of the enemies of Christ? How do you respond?

Well, look at how Nehemiah responded. Look at how he and the people responded when they were faced with what appeared to be a massive degree and volume of opposition against them.

What did they do? Well, notice they prayed. They prayed. The response of God's servants to the rage of man. They committed themselves to God.

You see that in verse 4 and 5. In verse 9, the prayer of Nehemiah. Hear, O our God, for we are despised. Turn back their taunts and their heads, their own heads.

And give them up to be plundered in a land where they are captives. Do not cover their guilt. And let not their sin be blotted out from your sight. For they provoked you to anger in the presence of the builders.

[13:33] In verse 9, We prayed to our God and said, A guard is a protection against them day and night. So they prayed. But notice how they prayed.

Notice how Nehemiah and the people prayed. See, as we said, verses 4 and 5 in verse 9. We have to say, first of all, that Nehemiah prayed urgently and immediately.

He wasted no time in calling on God. Now, we've already seen in chapter 1 how much Nehemiah was a man of prayer. How Nehemiah had committed the situation in Jerusalem to God's care.

We saw that when he was before King Artaxerxes, that he uttered that arrow prayer before God. For God's wisdom to be given to him.

Now, again, we're seeing Nehemiah responding to a particularly critical situation in prayer. And doing so with urgency and doing so immediately.

[14:35] He's not brooding long upon the situation. He's calling upon God. And there's a lesson for each one of us. We so often, don't we, brood long and hard over a particular situation that might even have the better of us.

And we're perhaps fearful of the extent of the opposition of God's people against his church. And rather than having that urgency to pray, we brood.

And we wait. And we stop what we're doing. Rather than continuing in strength of God the Lord as he leads us. As we commit to him our work.

As we commit to him who gives the increase. We can so easily be tempted, maybe even to give up. And if that's your temptation, even at this time, sometimes even just to stop and give up.

Well, look at the example of Nehemiah. And just see how he prays in his urgency. And notice in the wording of his prayer, you might say it's righteous anger.

[15 : 40] Now, he's not angry against God. He's angry against those who have insulted God. And so he's directing his prayer against those who have insulted the name of God.

Who've dishonored the truth of God. And Nehemiah's been very honest in his prayer. Nehemiah's desiring the punishment of Zambalat and Tobiah and their supporters.

It's not revenge that he's asking for. Absolutely not. It's the honor of God's name that's at stake. And, you know, in your own response to the many vicious attacks that maybe you're facing even now.

The vicious attacks of persecution in God's church. Whether these attacks are verbal or even physical. There are times when you will see God's wrath against those who are wholly opposed to him in the cause of the gospel.

And that righteous anger is directed for the honor of God. That desire for God's holiness to be upheld.

[16 : 48] Of course, there will be times when righteous anger is the correct response to the evils of satanic attack against the Lord's people. C.S. Lewis put it like this.

He said, the absence of anger is a most alarming symptom. And the presence of indignation may be a good one. Because these things against God are wrong.

And they're hateful to God. I remember some years ago, a ministry colleague of mine in Sky, a very mild-mannered minister. He was telling me that one time he was preaching and he got quite animated in his preaching and expressing a form of righteous anger.

Something you've never, ever experienced or expressed before. And he said, after the service, one of the congregation came up to him afterwards and said to my friend, he said, it was actually good to see him with that righteous anger in the cause of the gospel.

But if you're still not quite sure in your mind about these times, these occasional times, when righteous anger should be expressed, well, look to Jesus. Look to the Lord Jesus. Look to him when he expressed righteous anger against those who were clearly setting themselves up against God and their legalism and commercialism there in the temple.

[18 : 08] Yes, Jesus calls us to pray for those who persecute us. He calls us to love our enemies. But there's no contradiction between Jesus' words of grace and the righteous anger, which at certain times has to be expressed from you who love the Lord and love the truth of the gospel.

And Nehemiah certainly was expressing here in this prayer righteous anger at a particular moment, at a very crucial moment in the lives of the people there in Jerusalem. Notice he's praying dependently on God.

He's praying that God gives the increase. He's praying that God protects his people from the threats, the taunts, even the threat of physical violence against them.

He's praying that God will protect the people against discouragement in the face of the enemy. And therefore, it's for each one of us to be the more in the throne room of prayer, the throne room of heaven, that we, the more we pleading to God for his church, that God protects his church, that God protects his people, that God would silence the voices of rage against God and his people, that God would silence those who intend to bring harm on God's church, on God's people, and God's cause.

And don't be discouraged. Don't be discouraged in your prayers when the enemies of God appear to be in the ascendancy. That's why we read again in verse 9, Nehemiah has already prayed to God for God's protection, but we see again, he further prays in verse 9 as the hostility against Nehemiah and the people increase, and some ballot on Tobiah have their enemies with them, their allies with them, sorry.

[20 : 07] And Nehemiah has certainly been tested, his faith's been tested, the faith of the people's been tested, their dependence on God has been tested. And as we see in verse 9, as they continue in prayer, then they're committed fully and wholly to God in whom their full trust and faith is expressed.

And we see then that they have that renewed resolve, as we were singing in Psalm 138, that resolve to be strengthened, in the work of God, that resolve of faith in the work of God.

So we built the wall, verse 6, and all the wall was joined together to have its height, where the people had a mind to work. So Nehemiah is a man of action, but he's a man of action and dependence on God.

He sought the Lord, he's exercised his God-given gifts to prepare the people to build the walls, and he's encouraging them, he's showing his leadership and encouragement, and he's doing this all under the sovereign will of God.

So he's not going to be deterred when he sees the enemies around him. He's not going to be deterred even when he sees an army to the north. He knows that God is stronger than even the strongest forces of the enemy.

[21 : 26] And so he encourages the people to continue in the work and to have that resolve to do the work of the Lord. And they're going to build a wall, and they're going to build in wisdom.

As we read, the walls joined together, all the different component parts of the wall are now completed. The wall's only at half its height, but nevertheless, the wall is now surrounding Jerusalem.

So this combination of faith and wise conduct, well, we've already seen that in verse 9, we pray to our God and set a guard as protection against the enemies day and night.

So there's that combination of trust in God and godly wisdom. Wisdom in acting, acting with prudence, acting with wisdom, acting in good sense.

in relation to the real needs of the moment. That combination of faith, trust in God, under his sovereignty, and exercising God-given wisdom. That's a principle, that's a pattern that we all do well to practice in our lives as individuals, in our life as a church.

[22 : 38] It's that wisdom that we find in Proverbs 16, verse 3. Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established. Putting God first.

Putting God first in every decision that you're to make, in every decision of life that you're seeking to undertake. Put God first.

Put Him first. Whether in your life or life as a congregation, the life of the church, put Him first.

Commit your plans to God.

Do it first. What Jesus says, seek first the kingdom of God, and all these other things will be added unto you. So it's just the height of foolishness to rush into anything without first calling upon God for His direction, for His wisdom, and for His mercy.

It's the wise person who, in the parable, who built his house on the rock, on the rock of God, the rock of Christ. And it's for you to do the same as you commit to Him.

[23 : 43] All, every aspect of your life is care and is keeping. As we've seen, the wise person, the person who exercises God-given wisdom, yes, there's actions to be performed, there's acts to be done.

And therefore, as we've seen here with Nehemiah, the work and the workers are the more energized. That wisdom's been exercised in exercising these God-given gifts to get that work done.

And as we've seen, having prayed a second time, we notice guards were put against the wall. So there's a greater organization. These guards are put in family groups.

There's that unity, that unison together. And in other words, we're seeing this combination of prayer and trust in God. Prayer, trust in God, going hand in hand.

And action to follow. We read that in the last verse, in verse 14. The words, remember the Lord, and then a little while later, and fight.

[24 : 50] Remember the Lord and fight. And with that, I think we'll finish our thoughts on this passage. As we seek to be builders of God's church, we do it, you do it, not in your own strength, but in strength of God the Lord.

The fight, yes, there is a fight. There is a battle. The fight is real because the enemy is real. And the rage of man against God is real. That rage that continues.

You've got weapons to fight in that fight, that fight of faith. These are weapons that aren't man-made, but are God-made. It's these spiritual weapons that God gives to each one of his children to engage in that spiritual warfare.

And here in Nehemiah 4, we've seen, well, we've seen the weapons of faith and prayer. Faith to extinguish the fiery darts of the evil one. Prayer, praying in the spirit.

Prayer, making your request before God that what God has given you to do, that you'll know success in the wisdom that God gives you, the strength that God gives you.

[26 : 05] So use the weapons that God gives you. Use these weapons well. We are thinking a lot at the moment and still thinking a lot about our frontline workers in healthcare doing such a marvelous and wonderful work in stemming this virus.

You know, God calls each one of us to be frontline workers, frontline soldiers, frontline soldiers in the good fight of faith and use the weapons that God gives you in that fight.

Just as a soldier keeps his weapons primed in good order, so you keep these weapons primed.

Keep them in good working order. Don't let these spiritual weapons get rusty through neglect.

Pray, believe, have faith and know know that the victory is yours in Christ. Amen.

Let us pray. Lord, we give you thanks for the weapons that you give to each one of your children in the fight against the evil one and that spiritual warfare.

[27 : 17] Lord, forgive us when we've neglected to use these weapons, when we've sought to do things in our own strength and in our own way rather than look to you to give the increase.

Hear us, Lord, as we depend upon you for all things. Hear us, Lord, as we commit to your very lives. Commit to you all that we are for the sake of your name and for your glory.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, we're going to close now in Psalm 40. We see you in groups on the screen.

Psalm 40. I think we're going to have verse 2 and verse 4. to yourself. He took me from a fearful pit and from the miry clay and on a rock he set my feet establishing my way.

Psalm 40, 2-4 for God's praise. He took me all the fearfulness and on a rock he set my feet he salvaged in my way.

[28 : 51] He put a news song in my mouth our God to man divine many shall see and shall fear and on the Lord revive.

O blessed is the man whose trust upon the Lord relies presenting all the proud and the love shall pass to Christ.

Close in prayer now. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Amen. love This is glucos