

Resisting the Lies of Man

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[0 : 00] As you know, we're going through the book of Nehemiah. We're looking at this faithful servant of God who remained faithful to God and obedience to God, even though there was so much opposition to Nehemiah when he left the relative comfort of his position as the chief cupbearer in Persia to go to Jerusalem to help rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and indeed to restore, we might say, restore the name of God in that place.

And so we've seen how much opposition Nehemiah has faced against two particular individuals whose names we see at the top there in verse 1. And so we're going to look at these verses that we see there, 1 to 14, in relation to how Nehemiah deals with the conspiracy against him.

So let's read from verse 1 to verse 14. Now, when Sanballat and Tobiah and Gisham the Arab and the rest of their enemies heard that I built the wall and there was no breach left in it, although up to that time I had not set up the doors and the gates, Sanballat and Gisham sent to me saying, come and let us meet together at Hachathirim in the plain of Ono.

But they intended to do me harm. And I sent messengers to them saying, I'm doing a great work and I cannot come down. 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 and it was written.

[1 : 46] It is reported among the nations. And Gisham also says it, that you and the Jews intend to rebel. That's why you're building the wall. And according to these reports, you wish to become their king.

And you've also sent up prophets to proclaim concerning you in Jerusalem. There's a king in Judah. And now the king, King in Persia, will hear 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 that are inventing the might 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.

Now when I went into the house of Shemaiah, the son of Goliath, son of Mehebus, who was confined to his home, he said, let us meet together in the house of God within the temple.

[2 : 49] Let us close the doors of the temple for they're coming to kill you. They're coming to kill you by night. But I said, such a man, 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 Tobias and some ballot have hired him.

For this purpose he was hired, that I should be afraid and act in this way and sin. And so they should give me a bad name in order to taunt me.

Remember Tobias and some ballot, O my God, according to these things that they did. And also the prophetess Noadia and the rest of the prophets who wanted to make me afraid.

Then some verses in Matthew's gospel in relation to this, what we'll be considering in a moment, this whole aspect of truth-telling.

[3 : 53] Matthew 7, 16 to 23. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes or figs from thorn bushes?

So every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.

Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, you will recognize them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of

heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

On that day many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name and do many mighty works in your name?

And then will I declare to them, I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. May God add his blessing to these readings from this holy word.

[5 : 03] On Wednesday evening at our midweek prayer meeting, we were considering the ninth commandment, the commandment that tells us they shall not bear false witness.

That commandment that deals particularly with the aspect of lying, and the various different aspects within lying, things such as slander, rumour mongering, spreading false rumour, false witness, even deception, deceit, flattery.

All these aspects of that commandment that, in fact, we read off there in Nehemiah in the first 14 verses. The teaching that we will see in this passage really connects us with this whole aspect of being warned and to be aware of all the many devices, all the many ways that the evil one will try and disrupt the work of God.

When things such as rumour, deception, slander against the Lord's people are brought forth, and it's for the Lord's people to take that stand for truth, to be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

And as we're going to see in the example of Nehemiah, Nehemiah stands strong. Nehemiah is very aware of the enmity against him. He's already experienced much enmity from these two individuals, some ballot than Tobiah.

[6 : 44] Nehemiah is very aware that these individuals want to stop the work, the work going on in Jerusalem, because the work in Jerusalem will bring security to the Lord's people and reveal the power of God there amongst the people of the Lord.

And so we're going to see how Nehemiah takes his stand against those who try and disrupt the work of the kingdom of God's work. And as we see in Nehemiah's example, to be encouraged because the work of the Lord continues.

The Lord's people have work to do. You have work to do. You have particular roles to play, work to do in building the kingdom of God. And when that happens, you will face opposition.

You will face whether it be direct opposition from those who will directly attack you, bring forth particular false evidence against you, slander you, deceive in so many ways.

And it may not be directly against you personally. It may even be when you see so many things happening, words spoken, words written against the church, against the Lord's people, that can bring disconcerting, disconcerting can bring unease, even in your own heart.

[8 : 05] And so as we see the example of Nehemiah, as he takes his stand against those who would seek to disrupt and destroy the work going on in Jerusalem, then I pray that we see the more the Lord Jesus, when he faced the opposition of man, when he faced the false accusations, the slander against him, that we see how the Lord Jesus remains strong, that when he knew that he had particular work to do in salvation and saving those for whom he came to die.

And so we're going to consider really what it means to resist, to resist the lies of man, to be strong, to be courageous, and to know that the Lord is with each one of his people whom he calls to serve him.

So we're going to look first of all at verses one to four, where we see how Nehemiah resists deception. You know, it's saying that the burdens of leadership weigh heavily on those who've been given these particular responsibilities in leadership.

And that, of course, is true. And so many walks of life. And for Nehemiah there in Jerusalem, the burden of leadership weighed heavily upon him.

He left, as we said, left the comforts of the palace of the king in Susa, in Persia, the Persian Empire. He'd been led by God to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls.

[9 : 42] He had the burden of leadership in organizing that construction program, that reconstruction program. And for that, he was assaulted verbally.

He was threatened. He was victimized, we might say, by those who had no desire to see God's name honored there in Jerusalem. He was mocked.

He was slandered. He was threatened, threatened with physical violence. And all along, he remained strong. He remained strong in the Lord.

He'd come to complete a work that God had given him to do. He wouldn't be sidetracked by those who were against him. And as we read on in the story, as we've come to chapter six, you see Nehemiah's enemies bring about a renewed attack.

On him and the people there in Jerusalem. And what we're going to see and what we're going to notice isn't just confined to the times of Nehemiah.

[10 : 45] We'll see that the tactics used against the Lord's people, used by those who have no desire to see God's name honored, we'll see that these tactics haven't really changed much in what, two and a half thousand years.

So let's look at what happens there in Jerusalem. The broken down walls have been restored. If you were to have read later on in the passage, in the chapter, we'd see it had only taken 52 days for the walls to have been restored. Or certainly, the physical structure of the walls put back together again.

The doors still had to be put in place. But, of course, seeing the walls restored meant that Nehemiah's enemies are the more determined to discredit Nehemiah, to bring a bad report against him, to intimidate him, to threaten him, to cause him so much damage because their previous efforts hadn't succeeded.

So, we see here that the efforts of those who are opposed to the Lord's people, the efforts won't cease. They won't stop. Venom and opposition against the Lord's people, against the Lord's name, against the Lord's cause, continues.

[12 : 04] The devil does go about as that roaring lion and will continue to do so and continue to cause strife and damage even to the Lord's people.

It's the tactic that we see so often used. We see the Lord's people assaulted, attacked, intimidated. The gospel in their mind, whether it be through verbal violence, physical violence, pressures given to silence the voices of the Lord's people.

When the Lord's people speak out against so many of the ills and the ills of today, pressure groups around, whether it be as we see so often and even recently in places such as universities and through the media, this constant assault, assault, assault against the Lord's people, against the Lord's name.

And the devil will not cease his attacks until the Lord returns. And for Nehemiah, for these enemies of righteousness, they're not lying down peacefully.

They are determined that they'll harm him and harm him. They can't harm him physically, certainly harm him by reputation. As we see, and as we've seen, as we've read in the chapter, we'll see how they organise, how they conspire really against him to harm, really harm the cause of the Lord.

[13 : 35] And so, as we look through this passage, we'll see how we're instructed, how you're instructed to deal with the threats, to deal with the opposition that inevitably comes your way when you take your stand for truth.

Again, when you take that stand against those who hate the name of the Lord, who hate the gospel, who hate the church, who hate all that concerns the Lord Jesus Christ.

And as we're going to see in verses 1 to 4, in fact, in the first 14 verses, we'll see that so often Satan does come as a man of peace. Sanballat and Tobiah certainly know that they haven't succeeded in the stopping of the walls being rebuilt.

Nehemiah is still there. Nehemiah's reputation is still intact. His presence, obviously, has infuriated these two enemies. And so, they're out for revenge.

And this time, they're going to use subtle tactics. They're going to appear friendly. They're going to appear as men of peace, as, you know, letting bygones be bygones.

[14 : 49] But all the time in their hearts, their hearts are contrary to God's word. Their hearts are directed against the Lord and His people.

And so, they plan in subtle ways to, as it were, be rid of Nehemiah. You see in verse 2, they're going to try and lure Nehemiah away from Jerusalem.

They've asked them to go to one of the villages that's halfway between Jerusalem and Samaria to the north. In other words, they're going to lure Nehemiah away from the security of Jerusalem.

They're going to try and bring him to this village, this very small village, make out that it's a neutral venue, lure him away, thinking that he's going to meet with people that have given up the fight and so they can be friends, when in fact, this wasn't to bring about peace, but it was a trap.

And four times, Nehemiah receives these requests to come to this so-called neutral venue. But Nehemiah is strong.

[15:59] Nehemiah realizes that this is a trap. He's given, been given the spiritual discernment to realize that those who are proclaiming peace, peace, are not, don't have peace in their hearts.

He's not going to abandon the work in Jerusalem. He's not going to leave his people. He's not going to go to a particular place where there's no love for him or for the Lord's cause.

And as we look at this little episode, the first four verses, there's much that you and I can gain in our application. But look at the tactics.

Look at the tactics from those who seek to damage the Lord's work and the Lord's people. Look at what's said. Look at what's done. We see lies.

We see the lies of deception making out that those who are the enemies of God's word and God's cause making out that they're for peace when in fact they're for war.

[17:04] You see, as it were, the lures, the wiles, the ruse of the evil one against the Lord's people. Flattering words. Flattering words making it appear that some ballot and to buy at want reconciliation with Nehemiah when in fact their intention isn't reconciliation but harm.

That's, of course, so often the tactics of the enemies of the gospel. It can appear it's so friendly, so warm, it can appear even to be in the Lord's side but in fact are wolves in sheep's clothing.

Just as Jesus reminded his disciples in Matthew chapter 7, 15 to 16, the words that we read earlier. Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

You will recognize them by their fruits. Nehemiah had that spiritual discernment to see the wolves under the camouflage of the sheep's clothing.

He could see their fruits, their conduct. Well, he'd already seen that in previous experience. He'd seen the ways that they tried to undermine the work before and he knew that they hadn't changed.

[18:21] They hadn't shown any evidence of repentance. They hadn't shown any evidence of transformed lives. They hadn't shown any desire to order the Lord's work there in Jerusalem.

Nehemiah had that spiritual discernment to see through their lies, their deception. and it's for each one of us to have that spiritual discernment.

Particularly when we see those who appear as sheep, who appear as innocent, who might appear even to be in the army of the Lord and in fact their foot soldiers and the forces of evil know the fruits of those who peddle false teaching.

Be spiritually attuned to whatever you hear and see whether it be through various media channels and air, whether it be through particular books, from those who appear so plausible but in fact have no saving grace and no true desire to know and to follow the Lord Jesus as Saviour, as Lord.

And so don't be duped by these false prophets who so often lure the spiritually vulnerable, who have promises of instant healing, instant wealth, instant peace, when in fact all along they're denying the necessity of salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who deny that salvation is through faith alone, by grace alone, in Christ alone.

[20:02] Don't be taken in by these false teachers who deny the fundamentals of the truth. So be in your guard, be in your guard against those religious deceivers who promise the world but in fact provide nothing.

In fact, this provides something, they provide a delusion, a delusion of happiness. Be on your guard, just as Nehemiah was in his guard against those whose heart's intent was to undermine his work, to undermine his reputation and even endanger his life.

And so notice in the passage that we read that the opponents of Nehemiah, they were relentless in their opposition. As we read, they tried four times to bring Nehemiah from Jerusalem to this so-called neutral venue.

Four times they tried, four times Nehemiah resisted. But then there's a fifth attempt and in many ways the most subtle.

You see in verses five to nine, particularly verse five to seven where we read some ballot sending a message, an open letter.

[21:14] He sent his servant to give Nehemiah this open letter with all kinds of rumour attached to that, within that letter. Let's read, it's reported among the nations, and Gishim the Arab also says it, that you and the Jews intend to rebel.

That's why you're building the wall. And according to these reports, you wish to become their king. And you've also sent up prophets to proclaim concerning you in Jerusalem, there's a king in Judah.

And now the king will hear of these reports. So now come and let us take counsel together. I mean, this is rumour, this is slander. This is, you know, the slander that those who are spreading these false statements, they're trying to damage Nehemiah's reputation.

And you see the devious methods of these enemies of God and enemies of Nehemiah. They're sending an open letter, obviously, there's an open letter on the route from Samaria to Jerusalem. It's going to be read by so many people, and people are going to read this letter. Rumour's going to take root in their hearts, and they're going to believe what these accusations are. They're going to believe the rumours.

[22 : 28] They're going to believe that Nehemiah, in fact, all along is seeking up his own power in Jerusalem. So the subtle tactics are already, as it were, in place. And then there's the exaggeration.

Exaggeration based in falsehood. The report, the so-called report among the nations. And there's absolutely no evidence, nothing to say that among the nations around that these reports were in place.

Again, just this rumour based in falsehood. You know, you're building the walls to make yourself into rebels against the king, and you're going to set yourself up as king.

And intimidation. And now the king will hear of these reports. And then the deception. So now come and let us take counsel together. I mean, you know, this is rumour, slander, intimidation.

Nehemiah is the target of such tactics. Sunballot is using the subtlety, they're using the subtlety of deception to try and influence Nehemiah, to try and weaken him, to try and bring him away from his moorings, his roots, his faith in God.

[23 : 44] These tactics that are designed to undermine the Lord's servant. Of course, they sounded plausible. The king did hear these rumours.

He would certainly act against Nehemiah. He'd bring an army against Jerusalem. The walls would be broken down again, and the people in a worse position than before. Nehemiah deal with these attacks.

And looking at how he deals with them, how do you deal with these attacks that do come along, whether to you personally, if you're a Christian, or indeed whether to the Lord's cause that you hear so often, that you read so often, how do you deal in your heart with those accusations, those slanders, those rumours that come along so frequently?

Look at Nehemiah's response. First of all, he denied the rumours. He knew his heart. He knew where he truly was before God.

He denied them. And notice in denying these rumours that he commits himself to God, that he prays that God would strengthen his heart, that God would strengthen him to continue the work in Jerusalem, that God would strengthen his heart so that Nehemiah wouldn't be weakened by these false reports against him.

[25 : 08] I said to him, no such thing as you say have been done, for you're inventing them out of your own mind. For they're all wanted to frighten us, thinking their hands will drop from the work and it will not be done.

But now, oh God, strengthen my hands. And even in these words, there's so much to encourage you, so much to strengthen you, in these times when you face such accusations, when you hear such assaults in the Lord's church and the Lord's people, when you face and when you hear against the Lord's church rumour and slander and hurtful accusations and intimidation, things that might even try and make you stumble in your faith.

But listen, yes, we've listened to how Nehemiah deals with it. Listen again to what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

You know, I know, Christians are so often, and more often it seems at the present time, Christians are so often attacks, targets, in the media, particularly from secular opponents who accuse believers of so many things, so many falsehoods, things such as being uncaring or intolerant, that we brainwash our children, that we're bigots, that we're arrogant because we hold to the gospel truth that salvation is in Christ alone.

And as we say, it's not always, in fact, very often it's not the direct target, the direct assault, that you see such misinformation.

[26 : 59] It's not often the direct bullying, the direct slandering of the church, it's often done by subtle, indirect ways. And more often not, certainly in our own country, it's the indirect verbal assaults on the integrity and intelligence of Christians that we see and hear so often.

you see it, you see it, if you go to the media, any media report, any news channel, you'll see it. You'll see the attacks on the gospel, the attacks on God's word, the attacks on God's people, you'll see it in the media, you'll see these attacks, often subtle attacks on the message of scripture, God's word undermined, and therefore the faith of God's people being undermined.

And it hurts, it does hurt. It hurts when Christians are attacked directly or indirectly, when you're falsely accused of all kinds of evil, even when you're mocked for your stance, even the particular pertinent moral issues of the day.

But remember, remember that Jesus himself was falsely accused. Remember when Jesus was a child before the Sanhedrin, false witnesses tried to lay false charges against Jesus so that Jesus could be tried and accused of crying punishable by death.

Jesus resisted these temptations. He didn't hear, he didn't crumble under such false accusations. [28 : 41] Jesus stood strong, he stood firm, he knew the will of God for the salvation of his people through him and Jesus would not be unbowed before such false accusations.

But how do you react when you're labelled falsely, when you're accused falsely? Well, surely as with Nehemiah, you seek the strength of God, you seek the enabling of God because people will, others will seek to malign you for your faith.

You'll be insulted, you'll be mocked, and you know, in mocking Christians, in fact, there's a mocking of God. So come before God as Nehemiah came before God.

Seek his enabling to be strong in the Lord and in the power of his mind. Because Nehemiah knew that without God's enabling, without God's power, Nehemiah knew that he was weak.

He knew that without God's enabling, without God's strength in him, that Nehemiah could crumble, that he could weaken in his faith. He could be tempted to listen to the lies being spread about him, and then be tempted to listen to the lies succumb under that temptation.

[29 : 58] And so he prays that God strengthens his hands, that God strengthens Nehemiah to resist these rumors, these slanderous accusations against him.

But of course, as we know, as Nehemiah knew, there's no let-up in the devil's assault, the devil's warfare.

There's no armistice, there's no truce. Satan won't rest his weapons and his attacks on the Lord's people. And as you see here in chapter the attempts of some balloting to buy and to get Nehemiah to go to that so-called neutral venue, that's failed.

But there's another tactic this time, there's deceit. We read there in verses 10 to 14, we read of Nehemiah going to this house of this so-called prophet, this man called Shemiah.

And this prophet, the so-called prophet, tells Nehemiah that there's a danger to Nehemiah's life. It's better if Nehemiah goes to the temple, hides in the temple because there are people out there who want to kill him.

[31 : 19] And so if Nehemiah goes to the temple, he's going to be safe and protected from these assaults from his enemies. So far Nehemiah's seen through the lies and the cunning of his enemies.

In many ways, this next attack is the most subtle and one that could have caused Nehemiah to fall. After all, this is the home of someone who's called a prophet.

And after all, there are certainly many who weren't happy with Nehemiah's leadership. if we can go to chapter 5 rather, there were those who were unhappy with Nehemiah's leadership.

There were those outside Jerusalem who certainly were against him. So in many ways, what this so-called prophet had said to Nehemiah seemed plausible. But of course, again, Nehemiah had that spiritual discernment to resist this deceit.

Nehemiah realized that this prophet wasn't someone who'd been sent from God, but in fact, had been hired by these two individuals, some Balak and Tobiah, to discredit him.

[32 : 33] If Nehemiah had gone into the temple, he would have broken God's law because Nehemiah wasn't a priest. He had no right to go into the inner part of the temple.

And if he'd gone there, that would have discredited him amongst the people he would have seen to have broken God's law. And so Nehemiah realizes that the word that the so-called prophet, has given him, isn't from God, it's from his enemies.

And you know, in the spiritual warfare that Christians face, as we've already said, we'll say it again, sometimes Satan does come as a man of peace.

There are those who sound utterly believable, utterly convincing, impausible words that appear right, and in fact they're nothing but the devil's deception.

Just because somebody wears the garments of religion doesn't mean to say that that person is clothed in the cloak of Christ's righteousness. That's what Jesus said in Matthew's Gospels.

[33 : 41] We read, not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who's in heaven. will listen to the words of John that John wrote in his first epistle, verse John 4, 1-3.

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they're from God. For many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God.

Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. And every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. So how do you respond when maybe you hear or see someone for whom you're uncertain of whether they are indeed of the Lord in Christ, proclaiming the truth of salvation?

How do you respond if you're not sure? Will you listen to God's word? Be grounded, be rooted in the truth of God's word, and follow Jesus.

So you may know Reverend John MacArthur in America just a couple of days ago he wrote this, many ways that coincided with my preparation for this morning.

[34 : 59] John MacArthur said this and he said it so rightly, the sheep who belong to God will never follow a stranger, they'll never follow a false teacher, they'll follow the voice of their master.

And of course the voice of your master, you know the Lord Jesus, that voice is the voice of Jesus. So listen to that voice of Jesus when Jesus tells you, he told his disciples in John 10, 27, my sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me.

So in that spiritual warfare that you're engaged in, be rooted in the word of God, hear the voice of God speak to you through his word and be immersed in scripture as you hear the voice of Jesus, the Lord Jesus speak to you.

So are you hearing that voice? Are you listening to that voice? Are you applying what you hear, what you listen to, are you applying that and you're fighting the good fight of faith?

Are you resisting the false accusations, the false rumors, the slander that come from those who have no love for the Savior? Are you doing that? Well if you are, it takes discipline, it takes commitment, it takes that desire to love God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength and indeed your neighbor as yourself.

[36 : 26] It takes that discipline, that commitment to abide by God's word and God's will when you are engaged in that spiritual warfare. And so be inspired even this morning, be inspired by the example in Nehemiah and his resistance against all as we've seen all who would undermine the cause of truth.

As you see his example, remember that his example points to the ultimate example of resistance to the evil one. And Jesus withstood the temptations of the devil.

The devil tried to derail Jesus from his mission of salvation. And Jesus by the word using the word of God, through the devil's accusations in the devil's face.

And Jesus was strong in the Lord. And so be strong in the Lord and the power of his might as you engage in that spiritual warfare.

Amen. Let us pray. Our Lord, our God, our Heavenly Father, you who have given to us the gospel of salvation.

[37 : 39] May it be that we love that gospel and seek to honour you and your word by upholding the word of truth, by being those who are Christian soldiers, those who do truly seek to honour you and yes, who exercise that gifted faith to resist the assaults of the evil one.

Lord, strengthen any, even this morning, who are under particular attack at this time, who are in particular need. Lord, be with them, encourage them, be near them, strengthen them, provide for them.

And continue with us now, Lord, as we continue to worship you and praise. Continue with us now, we ask. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. In Andy's children's address, he mentioned the words of Psalm 121, and it so happens that we're going to close the service in Psalm 121, the traditional version.

I to the hills will lift mine eyes, from whence doth come my need, my safety cometh from the Lord, who heaven and earth hath made. Psalm 121, to God's praise.

Psalm 121, I put him not less like our will, he's somewhere that he is.

[39 : 44] We hold him at Israel, he's somewhere not nor sees.

He sees. The Lord, he gives the Lord thy shape on thy right hand thou safe.

The Lord, my life, he shall not slide, grail, they shall receive ■■■■■■■■■■, he shall preserve thanks of thy rolling out, Let's close in prayer.

And I make grace, mercy and peace from God. Father, Son and Holy Spirit rest upon and remain with you. Both now and forevermore. Amen.

Amen.