

Challenged but Courageous in the Work

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[0 : 00] But we begin our worship by singing to God's praise in Psalm 46. In the Scottish Psalter version, Psalm 46, we're going to sing from verse 1 to verse 7, page 271 of the psalm book, the tune is Strathcathro.

It's a psalm I'm sure we know very well, but it's often good to again to remind ourselves of God as our refuge and our strength, even when troubles arise and so much goes on around us that we find our safety, our help in him.

So we're going to sing from verse 1 to verse 7, God is our refuge and our strength. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. For although the air we live, we will not be afraid.

[1 : 21] Though hills and hills the seas becast, though waters roaring me, and troubled me, in all the hills, by swelling seas to shame.

The river is to stream to cloud, the city of our God.

The holy place where in the Lord was high and dear, God.

God in the midst of the heart of dwell, nothing shall ever remove.

The Lord to heart and ever will, and the uprightly blue.

[3 : 14] The deep and bridge to mount us free, the kingdom's new bled web.

The Lord to come, the wicked's voice, the earth did melt for fear.

The Lord of hosts upon our side, that constantly remain.

The God of hosts upon our refuge, as safely to maintain.

Let's come to God in prayer. Let us pray. Our gracious and eternal God, we come to you anew this evening hour.

[4 : 45] We come dependent upon you for all things. We come, O Lord, seeking your strength. We come seeking your presence with us and your blessing upon all that we do.

In your name at this time, we thank you that we come opening up your word together. We come looking to your word and seeing what it has to say to us.

And we are reminded even in these words that we've sung, words that we've probably sung many, many times together. Or in different situations with different people.

And yet words that so often resonate with us. They speak to us, Lord, again and again as we see an ever-changing world around us. And yet we see and look to you as the unchanging God.

The one who is always there. The one who is ever-present and unchanging and unchangeable.

When we think of these words, the heathen rage tumultuously.

[5 : 47] The kingdoms move it well. And when we look at our world today and we see so much of the devastation that surrounds us, Lord. When we see kingdoms shaken by events.

When we see a people shaken by atrocities all around us. We thank you that we can come to you. That you are the Lord who has uttered his voice to us in the midst of it all.

You are the one who is speaking to us each and every day and each and every event. And we pray, Lord, that you will help us to hear your voice. And help many people in this world to hear.

But to heed your voice as well. Not to turn away from it. And not to ignore it. Not to dismiss it and to mock it. But to look to you.

For we need you, Lord. We need you in so many different ways. We need your help. We need, oh Lord, your nearness to us. We need that hope that you are able to give us.

[6 : 48] That you gave your people even long ago. The psalm here reminds us that you were Jacob's refuge. And we thank you that you are our refuge too.

And so we pray, Lord, that near and far as your people. Even as people gather for worship in this evening hour. Even as people have worshipped you throughout this day. Throughout the world.

We thank you, Lord, that you are the God who hears. And is able to answer prayer. And so we commit, oh Lord, ourselves into your hands. And all your people.
We thank you that you are our God. And there is no other. And so, Lord, we come humbly before you. Thankful for all that is ours in Christ Jesus.
That we are reminded that no matter the troubles of this world. No matter what comes our way. That our ultimate, our greatest security is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.
[7 : 47] And help us, Lord, that we will find our refuge and our strength in him. We pray, oh Lord, and ask for your goodness to us as a people here.

We thank you that we are reminded in your word that your kingdom comes. That you are building your church. And as we continue, oh Lord, our study in the book of Nehemiah.
As we again turn to it this evening and open it up. We pray, Lord, that you will still us in your presence. That you will help us to hear and to understand what you are saying to us.
Help us as preacher and hearers alike, oh Lord, to approach your word prayerfully. And with a desire for it, Lord, to learn from it. To apply it to ourselves.
Not just to see it as something from a distant past. Thousands of years ago. But something that is fresh and real for us today. Something that encourages us as well as challenges us today.
[8 : 48] Because we thank you that although the work is not the same in the sense of building the walls of Jerusalem. That in many ways we are still fulfilling your commission to us.

To be your church. To be your people. And to seek the good of your name. The praise of your name. In our town. In our islands.
In our lands. And all lands of the world. We thank you, Lord, for the great promise that you have given. That you will build your church. And that you will not allow the gates of hell to prevail against it.
And help us, Lord, when we feel weak. When we feel discouraged. When we feel the opposition great. Even as we see in the day of Nehemiah. To know and trust in you as our Lord and as our God.

So help us even in this coming week to go on in your strength. To do all for the glory of God. And for the good of your people. And for people all around us, Lord.
[9 : 46] We pray that you will help us and encourage us. And bind us together in the work of the gospel. That we would seek your good for all around us. We would see your blessing upon us.

We thank you for the ministry of your word that takes place in so many different ways. We thank you for the times of public worship such as we have just now. And as we gather during the week for times of prayer and worship.
But we thank you too for the quieter ways your work goes on. For individuals who take so much time to visit and to keep in touch with people.
To look out for others. For so many people who help quietly in the background. Doing so many tasks, oh Lord. That maybe go unnoticed by many. But we thank you, Lord.
That from all corners of our congregation. You are using your people. And we pray together that we be encouraged to give ourselves to the work. To encourage one another.

[10 : 45] To build one another up. To ask, oh Lord. What can we do in this place to help your cause? To commit ourselves to the Lord first and foremost.

And then to commit each other to each other as well. We thank you, Lord. For your teaching and your word. That reminds us of what our priorities are to be. That we are to seek first the kingdom of God.

And that then all other things will be added unto us. Give us wisdom, oh Lord. To apply these words to our lives and to our hearts. And we pray, oh Lord. For your church far and wide.

That we thank you for a communion season in our midst. We pray for the services taking place today. Even this evening hour in Calanish and in Cross. And those who have been together there for our communion weekend.

We pray there have been a blessed time. We pray for the upcoming week as well. For the congregation of Park. And for Reverend Ian McCritchie there. And the congregation as a whole.

[11 : 47] That we pray for visiting ministers. As they will have Reverend Paul Murray. And Reverend Ian Thompson over this coming weekend. And that you would bless the ministry of your word to them. To them all together.

We thank you for encouragements in the congregation there. And we pray, oh Lord. To continue to see and to hear of great things happening throughout your church. Far and wide. We remember other ministries, Lord.

Today as well. We are mindful of the congregation of Shabbos. Today as Reverend Calum MacLeod. Leads in his last services with them. As he comes to the time of retirement from the ministry.

We pray for them that's gathered there this evening. We pray for Calum. And thank you for his ministry there over many years. And pray, oh Lord, that you will bless that ministry.

Even in the days and months and years ahead. We pray, Lord, for him and his family. As he will soon be settling into retirement. But still with much to do in terms of his work for the Lord.

[12:51] Even especially in this week. Having been appointed as moderator to our denomination. For the next year. Taking place at the assembly in May. We thank you for that, Lord.

And for the acknowledgement of his years of service in the church. We pray that you will continue to use him. And to bless him. And to uphold him. In his ongoing ministry in different ways.

We pray for the congregation there as it becomes vacant. Lord, may you bless them. And guide them. And shepherd them throughout these days. And months ahead. We pray, Lord, for your provision.

For a new ministry there in your time. And according to your will. We pray, oh Lord, now that you will continue with us. That you will help us to look to you. And to trust in you with all our heart.

That you will build us up, oh Lord, in our faith. That you will encourage us in our hearts, oh Lord. And we thank you, Lord, for all that is ours in Christ. We thank you for a great salvation.

[13:50] And a great hope that we have in him. And we pray, Lord, that whatever comes our way. That you will always keep us looking to Jesus. The author and the perfecter of our faith.

So hear our prayers, oh Lord. Continue with us in our time together. Bless us, we pray. And pardon our sin. As we ask it all in Jesus' precious name.

Amen. So again, sing to God's praise. This time we'll sing in Psalm 127. In the Sing Psalms version. Page 171 of the psalm books. Psalm 127. We'll sing the whole of this psalm. The tune is Wiltshire. Page 171. Unless the Lord builds up the house, Its builders toil in vain. Unless he keeps the city safe, Then they vainly watch maintain.

[14:50] So we'll sing the whole of this psalm to God's praise. We stand to sing. Kung stolid, you are here in the kingdom of God is to live the hall.

The elders toil in vain, unless he keeps the seldomly safe, they mainly won't maintain.

In vain you rise before the dawn, and lift her skin with heat, that you may toil for food to eat.

He gives his cup of sleep. Sons are a precious heritage, a blessing from the Lord.

The children that are born to us are to lead his reward.

[16:45] Like an old sin, a warrior's hand, are children of one's youth.

The man whose whippers full of them is blessed by God in truth.

Such men will not be put to shame, but will not be their fate.

When they content are yet to boast, who takes them in the gate.

Amen. We can turn together to read now in the Old Testament in the book of Nehemiah.

[18:08] It's a continuous study in this book. We read in Nehemiah chapter 4. We can read the whole of this chapter in Nehemiah chapter 4.

Reading from the beginning down to the end of the chapter. Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged, and he 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 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 are building, if a fox goes up on it, he will break down their stone wall. Hear, O our God, for we are despised. Turn back their taunt on 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 have provoked you to anger in the presence of the builders. So we built the wall, and all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work. But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Astrodites 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 set their guard as a protection against them day and night. In Judah it was said, the strength of those who bear the burdens is failing. There is too much rubble. By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall. And our enemies said, 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 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, and your homes. When our enemies heard that it was known to us and that God had frustrated their plan, we all returned to the wall, each to his work. From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction and half held the spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. And the leaders stood behind the whole house of Judah, who were building on the wall. Those who carried burdens were loaded in such a way that each labored on the work with one hand and held his weapon with the other. And each of the builders had his sword strapped to his side while he built. The man who sounded the trumpet was beside me.

And I said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, the work is great and widely spread, and we are separated on the wall far from one another. And the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there, our God will fight for us. So we labored at the work, and half of them held the spears from the break of dawn until the stars came out. I also said to the people at that time, let every man and his servant pass the night within Jerusalem, that they may be a guard for us by night and may labor by day. So neither I nor my brothers nor my servants nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us took off our clothes, each kept his weapon at his right hand. Amen, and may God bless that reading from his word. Well, before we turn back to look at this passage, we'll sing again to God's praise, this time in Psalm 31 in the Scottish Psalter. We're singing from verse 13 down to verse 17, page 242 of the psalm book, Psalm 31.

[23 : 22] We sing from verse 13, the tune is Torwood. We see here a similar situation to what Nehemiah and the people were facing when there was slanderers all around them. Fear was in their midst, and there were those who were plotting against them in so many different ways. But verse 14 reminds us, but as for me, O Lord, my trust, upon thee I did lay, and I to thee, thou art my God, did confidently say. That we will be able to say these words for ourselves as well, that we can take confidence in the Lord. So we'll sing from verse 13 down to verse 17 to God's praise.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Let wicked men be shamed.

[26 : 52] Let them be silent in the grave. Amen. Well, we can turn back to our reading in Nehemiah chapter 4.

We'll consider some of these sections before us here in this chapter together. If you read again with me at verse 10, we see there some of the discouragement that the people were facing.

In Judah it was said, the strength of those who bear the burdens is failing. There is too much rubble by ourselves.

We will not be able to rebuild the wall. Then we can read again at verse 14 as well, where Nehemiah speaks to the people and says, 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, and your homes.

[28 : 11] This chapter is a real mix of ups and downs in the midst of the work that Nehemiah had come back to Jerusalem to do and to encourage the people of Jerusalem to return to the work of rebuilding the walls that had been devastated.

What we have seen of Nehemiah so far as we began our study in this book, we've seen him as one who was a servant for the king in Persia.

Some 900 miles away from Jerusalem. He had been born in that place, born of parents who had been taken captive from Jerusalem when they had been conquered and taken captive.

And Nehemiah had never seen Jerusalem for himself. But we see that as he was a cupbearer to the king in Persia, he heard news from Jerusalem, news that greatly troubled him.

That Jerusalem was in disarray. And this led to him getting a confident vision of what the Lord wanted him to do.

[29 : 21] And so he returned to Jerusalem or came to Jerusalem, not returning. He came to Jerusalem, saw it for the first time himself and the devastation that there was, and yet was still encouraged and an encourager to the people to get on with the work of rebuilding the wall.

But this was not without its challenges. Every step along the way, there was challenges as they got on with this work. But perhaps for ourselves, it's just important to think, what kind of task did Nehemiah face as he returned to Jerusalem?

We've mentioned the rebuilding of the walls. But what kind of walls are we looking at here? What's the importance of these walls of Jerusalem?

Well, it wasn't just a nice little block garden wall to protect the flowers or to protect the vegetable plot.

That's not the kind of walls that he was returning to rebuild at all. Remember what it said in chapter 1, verse 3. They were given an insight as to the devastation of Jerusalem.

[30 : 30] It says there in verse 3, The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame.

The wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are destroyed by fire. The walls of Jerusalem, walls of any city in those days, it had to be robust.

It had to be large. It had to be strong in order to stand up against attacks from the enemies. It had to surround the city entirely.

Just one breach in the wall could mean disaster for that city because the city would be conquered. And here is Jerusalem. There's no wall left all around it.

So the enemy is free to come in and to go out. The people can't get on with their lives as they would wish. They're influenced by outside enemies all the time.

[31 : 32] And in order to be themselves once again, to be a people once again, they need these walls rebuilt. And the wall itself stretched around Jerusalem for about two miles length to get right around the city.

The walls were, in some places, 12 meters high. Probably as high as the walls on the side of the church here. Two and a half meters thick, even thicker than these walls.

So that the task wasn't small. If you think about it in our own situation here, it's like building a wall like that from the church here, up to the manse and plaster field, and back again.

Who's up for that task? What would it be like to even just think of starting a work like that? It would just seem impossible in our eyes.

And for a time, it seems like it may be impossible in the eyes of the people in Nehemiah's day. But what was at stake here with Nehemiah and the people of his day, it was more than just the security of the city.

[32 : 46] It was the worship of the Lord and the salvation of the Lord's people. That's what was at stake. And as we think ourselves today of how this applies to us, we're not going to start building a wall from here to plaster field and back.

That's not what the Lord is calling us to. But we are involved, or we should be involved, in a building project that's even greater.

To be involved in the kingdom work of God. Because God is building his church. Of that we are assured through his word.

Until the day that he returns, he is building his church. And in order to build his church, he uses his people. We may not be building a physical wall, but he has commanded us in his word to the work of mission.

To the work of building his kingdom. The Lord has told his church in the New Testament. He has commanded his church to go in the Great Commission.

[34 : 03] To go and make disciples of all nations. He has given his church through every generation today, before us and after us, that commission, that work, to be involved in.

And as we think of that task, a little like it would be for those who are looking at Jerusalem in their day, when the walls were in ruin, it's a task that maybe seems beyond us.

It's a task that maybe makes us feel overwhelmed in it all. How are we going to do this work? Where do we start? We just don't have the resources.

We just have to maybe try and hold our own. Look after what we've got. But that's not the command of God's word. The command of God's word is not to stand still.

The command of God's word is not to look after what we've got. The command is still the same. Go and make disciples of all nations, of all people, all around us, near and far.

[35 : 09] We still have that great commission. But what was happening in Nehemiah's day was, for the past 13 years or so, up till this point, Jerusalem had been at a standstill.

All they were trying to do was just hold their own. The focus had been lost from looking to God and loving his people to just trying to survive day by day.

There was no encouragement. There was no sense of joy. There was no sense of mission or vision for the people. It had been lost. But as we have seen in the opening chapter here, a simple question that Nehemiah asked changed his life upside down.

When he asked that question, how are they in Jerusalem? And when he heard the disarray that they were in, the shame that was upon them, and the danger that they were in, it gave him this burden, that this vision was needed, that there was work to be done, that there was a renewed confidence in the Lord required.

And that is what Nehemiah came to Jerusalem with. Realism as to the work, the enormity of it, but yet a passion, a passion to stir up a people to the work.

[36 : 42] And last week we saw that he arrived in Jerusalem. He had taken this journey, maybe taking about four months, to travel from Persia down to Jerusalem.

And he arrived there. But he didn't immediately start with the work. He got his priorities right first. He spent a time, first of all, resting.

It says for three days he was in Jerusalem. He rested for a time. But then he went out for himself to review the situation, to see what was actually had happened in Jerusalem and the devastation that there was.

He saw for himself. But then he spoke to the people and said, it's a time to rise. It's a time for the work to go on.

And in chapter three, we didn't read it, but it outlines those who were involved in the work. You can read through it in your own time. It's worth looking through. Again, it seems like a list of names of people, but they're always significant.

[37 : 45] And we'll see that as we go on this evening. But it just shows you those who were involved in the work and the huge task that was involved in rebuilding these walls.

And they were enthused and they rose to the challenge. And initially things seem to be going well. But as is often the case, when things are going well in the Lord's work, what happens? Attacks come. Discouragements will come. But it's how do we deal with these things? That is the key. And that is what we want to take from chapter four this evening.

How do we deal with these challenges? And how do we remain courageous in the work of the Lord? So I want us to think of four things from this chapter.

First, conflict is inevitable. It's a sad thing to say, but conflict is inevitable. Secondly, we'll see discouragement is understandable.

[38 : 52] But then thirdly, we'll see keeping focused is crucial. And then fourthly, God is invincible.

So I want to look at these four things from the chapter this evening. Firstly, conflict is inevitable. In chapter four, as we read here, we join with the people as the work is going on.

The walls are being rebuilt. The people have engaged and they're enthused for it. But what we see is soon after the work's starting, that when God's people respond to the call to focus on God's work, the enemy will quickly rise up in opposition.

And the enemy will use all kinds of means to put the work into disarray once again. But maybe the obvious question to ask is, where has this opposition been for the last number of years when the walls lay in ruin?

Well, it's the opposition that has been keeping things down, not needing to do much. When people are discouraged, the devil doesn't have to do much to keep his people down.

[40 : 13] When they're discouraged, when they've got no vision, they're not doing anything. But as soon as Nehemiah arrives with this vision for this work, the enemy is on the case.

The enemy is there. And isn't it so true to this day? Whenever we're involved in the Lord's work, whenever we feel a sense of encouragement, whenever we feel that good things are happening, the attacks come.

The enemy attacks. It's always the case. The devil doesn't want the church to grow. The devil doesn't want the gospel to spread.

The devil doesn't want people to be saved. So as soon as something good is happening, he becomes more active. You see it in the days of Ezra.

The previous book to this. When Ezra came back, was involved in the work of rebuilding the temple at Jerusalem. There was chaos in the midst of that. There was confusion.

[41 : 24] There was discouragement in the midst of that. And Ezra says that this will be the case down through all the generations. So it's happening here in Nehemiah's day.

And you see it right throughout the scriptures. Discouragements. Attacks always come. And so when we think of that ourselves, we see it happening again and again.

Conflicts always arise when the work of the Lord is going on. And Jesus himself faced these conflicts too. When you look at the life of Jesus in this world, here in Nehemiah's day, you've got Sanballat and Tobiah.

Their names keep appearing. When you look at Jesus' days, you've got the Pharisees and the Sadducees and all of those who were opposed to him. Again and again, he faces conflict from them.

The enemy is attacking all the time. And there are times when the enemy seems to be victorious, when he's got on top of the people.

[42 : 36] That's what we see in verse 10 here. That's what you see when you look in the life of Christ and the cross especially. When he's crucified there, the people think, this is it, we've won.

But as we're often reminded, Christ is victorious. And the cause of Christ will not be put down even in the midst of conflict.

So we are reminded here that even as conflict comes, even though conflict is inevitable in so many ways, because Jesus reminds us in the Gospel of John, chapter 15, he says, if the world hates you, know this, it has hated me first.

We are reminded again and again that troubles will come. Tobias and Sambalat are here again. We hear them mentioned.

And we're going to come back to them again, not this evening, but another time, God willing, and see how they keep appearing. We'll see it in chapter 6, God willing. There's opposition in so many ways.

[43 : 50] There's conflict in so many ways, inside, outside, from outside forces, but also from within. But tonight, the question is this.

Do you want to be a builder or a wrecker? What side are you on? Are you seeking to be involved in the work of building the kingdom of God?

Or are you seeking to tear it down? Surely, we are all builders. Surely, we would all long to be builders in the kingdom of God, but be on our guard, because it's easy to become a wrecker, easy to be someone who brings it down.

There's a poem called this A Builder or a Wrecker, and it goes like this. As I watched them tear a building down, a gang of men in a busy town, with a ho, heave, ho, and a lusty yell, they swung a beam, and the side wall fell.

I asked the foreman, are these men skilled, and the men you'd hire if you wanted to build? He gave a laugh and said, no, indeed, just common labor is all I need.

[45 : 12] I can easily wreck in a day or two what builders have taken years to do. And I thought to myself as I went on my way, which of these roles have I tried to play?

Am I a builder who works with care, measuring life by rule and square? Am I shaping my work to a well-made plan, patiently doing the best I can?

Or am I a wrecker who walks to town, content with the labor of tearing down? O Lord, let my life and my labors be that which will build for eternity.

Are we builders or wreckers? The second thing we see here is that discouragement is understandable.

As well as the opposition, they also faced times of discouragement when everything just seemed too much. Nehemiah 4, verse 10, is probably a low point in their experience here where it says

there, the strength of those who bear the burdens is failing.

[46 : 32] There is too much rubble. By ourselves, we will not be able to rebuild the wall. It's understandable in so many ways.

When you think of the picture of Jerusalem at this time and the walls, just a bunch of rubble lying around, even though the work had gone on to a fair degree at this point, there was still much to be discouraged about.

So it's understandable that there was discouragement. It seemed that no matter how much they did, there just seemed to be more to do.

And again, it maybe rings familiar to ourselves as well as a church. No matter how much we seem to do, there's always just so much more to be done.

It feels like that. The task is never ending. But where does the real problem here lie? Well, when you look at it, it's not so much the circumstances that they're in, it's their attitude.

[47 : 41] Their attitude is being influenced by those enemies that have come alongside them, who are discouraging them. And because of that, they feel this way, that their focus is on themselves.

Our strength is gone. There's too much to do. Where do we start? By ourselves, we're not able to rebuild this wall.

So they're at this low point. And so often, that's the problem within ourselves too. It's when we begin to feel that sense of discouragement, that nothing's changing.

Even whatever we do, it doesn't seem to make any impact in our town or among our people.

They're not listening. They're not coming. They're not engaging. The task just seems too much for us.

We are not able to rebuild the wall. We are not able to rebuild the church. We cannot do it. What makes the difference? But we need to remember what we have in the Lord and what He has done for us.

[48 : 55] Psalm 1, 2, 6, at verse 3, it says, The Lord has done great things for us. We are glad. Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like streams in the Negev.

We need to focus on what the Lord has done. The Lord has done great things for us. They could be reminded of that in Nehemiah's day, and we'll see that in a moment, but surely we reminded that of ourselves.

The Lord has done great things for us. He has come to us. He died for us.

He rose from the grave for us. He prayed for us. He will come again for us. All these assurances we have in the Word of God.

The Lord has done great things for us. And that is what we have to stay focused on. That is what keeps us going.

[50 : 03] The more we see what the Lord has done for us, the more we see service to Him as just something we owe, something we love to do, something we're delighted to be involved in.

And there's an example here for us. As said, chapter 3, it just seems like a list of names. But there's a name on that list that's an example to us.

And it's worth looking at this just to see it. Looking for those who were enthused for the work. In Nehemiah 3, verse 11, we read there of a man called Machijah, the son of Haran.

Just a passing comment there on him. And it says that together with another man, Hashab, repaired another section on the tower of the ovens.

Now, it's just a passing comment, isn't it? But so often with these lists, you have to look deeper. We saw it in Colossians as we were looking at the list of names there.

[51 : 19] There's so much behind the name. And for this, you have to go back to Ezra chapter 10. And there's another list of the names there for us.

Beginning at verse 18, it says, those guilty of intermarriage. So, there are those who had failed to trust the Lord.

And in verse 25, you see there a list of names and of Israel of the sons of Parosh, Ramiah, Isaiah, Machijah.

His name is on that list. So, you find his name in two different lists here. Initially, he's on the list of those who are guilty of intermarrying, disobeying, the Lord.

But now, here he is in Nehemiah's day in chapter 3, verse 11. He's involved in the work of the Lord. He has done wrong before God, but he's been made right with God.

[52 : 27] And that is what enthuses him for the work. That is what keeps him going in the work. So, it's a great reminder to us of the power of God to save and of what we owe the Lord for our salvation.

We remember Onesimus in Colossians 2. He had a past where he'd failed God, but he was restored by God and was used by him.

So, what keeps us going in times of discouragement? Surely, to remember that the Lord has saved us. So, whether what we see here is opposition or discouragement, we fix our eyes on the Lord. And what you find here is that as they do that, as they keep restoring their faith, returning their vision, their focus to the Lord, you see it even in this chapter again and again.

Verse 6, in the midst of the conflict that they were seeing around them, it says in verse 6, so we built the wall. In verse 16, again, they had faced opposition and what does it say?

[53 : 43] From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction. They returned to the work. Verse 21, so we labored at the work.

They keep coming back to the work. They keep doing the same thing. And so, let's not lose heart. Let's not be discouraged. Even when it seems we're maybe just doing the same thing again and again, we are doing it for the Lord.

Lord. And that's what's the key. And we think of even roles in our own congregation and how people, many of you are involved in so many different roles in the church.

We've got Sunday school teachers. We've got people working with toddlers, with creche. We've got people on door duty and tea duty. We've got people who are visiting, doing the work of the deacon's court, the Kirk session, serving in so many different ways, even preaching of the word.

[54 : 48] It can all seem so often we're just doing the same thing again and again. And we maybe feel discouraged. What difference is it making? Is it doing any good and the devil will come in?

There'll be conflict. There'll be discouragement. But we take heart. We are doing it for the Lord. And the work of the Lord is a great work.

As Paul says to the church of Galatia in chapter 6, verse 9, he says, let us not grow weary of doing good. Let us not grow weary of doing all the tasks that we are involved in, even if it seems repetitive.

Even when it seems that there's no good coming out of it. let us not grow weary of doing good. For what does he say? For in due season we will reap if we do not give up.

And that's what you see here in Nehemiah. He keeps saying to them, don't lose heart. Don't give up. Don't grow weary in doing good because you will reap in due season.

[56 : 01] And that's the third thing that we see here. That keeping focused is crucial. You know, there was times when Nehemiah was afraid.

When you go back to chapter 2, verse 2, as he stood before the king there. It said, And the king said to me, Why is your face sad? Seeing as you are not sick, this is nothing but sadness of the heart.

Then I was very much afraid, he says. And I said to the king, he went on, he was afraid, but he went on.

It was Robert Louis Stevenson that once said, Keep your fears to yourself, share your courage with others. Well, that's what we see in some ways with Nehemiah here.

He wasn't keeping his fears to himself, though. He was sharing his fears with the Lord. But he was sharing his courage with others. And Nehemiah always keeps this vision in mind of the restoration of the wall.

[57 : 08] And it's much more than that. It's about the people of Jerusalem. The salvation of the people. And they needed to be reminded what they were fighting for.

And that's what he does. He refocuses them on the Lord and on the work. And that's what we see in verse 14. What he says to them there, he says, I looked and I rose 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 and your homes. He reminds them and he gives them a focus.

What were they fighting for? It was more than just walls. It was a people. And that's the fight that we are in today as well.

We are in the fight of faith and the fight for our people. Here, in verse 14, they're reminded that they were fighting for the faith.

[58 : 20] More was at stake than just the wall being built. It was the worship of God in Jerusalem. That was in the balance here. And that's what we're fighting for.

For people to come and worship God. He was fighting here. They were fighting here for their families. Fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives.

That's the fight that we are in. When those of our family are lost, when those of our community are lost, we are fighting for their salvation. We keep that in view.

our focus is on the work of the Lord. It seems an impossible task, but it's so necessary.

And in many ways here, they were fighting for their very future. The future of Jerusalem was at stake. So long as these walls were broken down, they were open to attack the enemy and the people of God could be done away with.

[59 : 35] But we know in the word of God that the Lord will keep his people. That he will always have his people. But surely we too are fighting for the future here as well.

That a generation after us will still worship God here. That a generation after us will serve the Lord here. We're in a fight.

But it's a fight worth fighting. It's worth fighting for. And that's what Nehemiah does. He stirs them up here to fight.

And he says, do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord. Are we up for the fight? Are we willing to fight in that way today to fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, your homes?

Charles Spurgeon have used this quote before, but it seems to tie in so well with this as well. He said, if sinners be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our dead bodies.

[60 : 49] And if they perish, let them perish with our arms wrapped about their knees, imploring them to stay. If hell must be filled, let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let no one go unwarned and unprayed for.

That's the challenge to us, to fight. The fourth thing and the final thing we see here just briefly is tied into these words, remember the Lord.

God is invincible. The danger with going through Nehemiah is that we can make it about ourselves. But Nehemiah is always focused on God.

He prays to God. He points to God. His passion is for God. One preacher puts it like this, Nehemiah, the book, is ultimately about Jesus Christ, about his great project of building his church against which the gates of hell will not prevail.

Nehemiah is not mainly about leadership or church growth or business management. Nehemiah is mainly about Jesus. Jesus is the one who builds the new Jerusalem, the church of the living God.

[62 : 16] God is building his church today. And the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

In verse 20 here, we're reminded of that as well. In the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet rally to us there, our God will fight for us.

God is on our side as we fight for him. But do we remember that? We don't look to ourselves. The psalm that we sang at the start, Psalm 127, reminds us, unless the Lord builds the house, the builders build in vain.

The Lord is building his church. He uses us, but we are to put ourselves into his hands. There's a story of a little boy who was traveling to see his grandparents.

He was flying an airplane to see his grandparents. And sat beside him on the plane was a professor from a university. And the professor sitting beside him wasn't a Christian at all, but he saw this little boy sitting beside him reading a Sunday school magazine.

[63 : 36] And the professor thought to himself he'd had some fun with the young boy. He turned to him and said, young man, if you can tell me something God can do, I'll give you a big shiny apple.

Well, the wee boy thought to himself for a moment and replied, sir, if you can tell me something God can't do, I'll give you a whole barrel of apples.

A simple faith. He wouldn't let God be mocked, no matter how intelligent this professor was. He turned it right back to him.

If you can tell me something God can't do, can you tell me something tonight God can't do? Can you look around this town and say God cannot save the people of this place?

God cannot rebuild his church here. If you say that you've lost faith because God is invincible.

[64 : 45] God is building his church. We ask ourselves are we builders or are we wreckers? Do we long to be involved in building his kingdom?

Do you believe that he is building his church church even here in Stornway? Yes, there are challenges for us, many of them, but we have to have confidence and faith in him. We fight. We fight for those who we love. We fight for those who we do not know. We fight for those who even just now are our enemies and enemies of God, but we pray that God will build his church. Nehemiah encouraged the people not to be afraid to remember the Lord, to fight and to build. Let us do likewise.

Let us rise and build, trusting the Lord. Let us pray. Our Father in heaven, give us eyes of faith, even as we look around us, and give us a prayer of faith offered up to you, that we would come before you, trusting in you, in all your goodness to us, in all that you are able to do, never doubting that there is anything that you cannot do, for with God all things are possible.

[66 : 22] So Lord, hear our prayers, continue with us as a people, build us up as a church, here and all throughout the world, we pray, Lord, that your people will glorify your name, day and night, young and old, all throughout our lands, for we ask it for the glory of our Saviour.

Amen. Amen. We're going to conclude by singing to God's praise in Psalm 18, in the Sing Psalms version, Psalm 18, verse 27, verse 27.

The tune for this is Talis Canon. We'll sing from verse 27 down to verse 30, three stanzas. You save the humble and the meek, but bring the proud down from their height.

You, Lord, will keep my lamp aflame. God turns my darkness into light. And again, verse 29, we're reminded that with God we can advance against a troop.

So we'll sing these three stanzas, verse 27 to 30, to God's praise. Amen. Lord, will keep my lamp aflame.

[67 : 59] God turns my darkness into light. With help from God I can advance against a troop and and rarts them all and with the aid my God will give I can leap over any wall.

For perfect is the way of God no flaw is found within his word.

To all who put their trust in him a shield and refuge is the Lord.

After the benediction I'll go to the door to my right this evening. We'll close with the benediction.

Now may grace, mercy and peace from God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest upon and abide with you all now and forever more.

Amen.