A stone wall with plants growing on it

Description automatically generated

Daily Worship Booklet

Week 6

God tells us that Ezra read from the book of the Law,

day after day and the people of God were filled with joy!

Produced by the Ottawa RPC to aid the daily worship of God.

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**The book of Nehemiah focuses on the work involved in labouring to see Christ build his church.**

**Monday – Nehemiah 4:1-6 – Nehemiah’s response to ridicule.**

On Friday we considered Sanballat’s ridiculing and mockery regarding, as he saw it, the utter incompetency of the Jews. He, as we saw, was supported by a snide comment from Tobiah about the pathetic level of workmanship. How should such ridicule, mocking, and sneering be addressed? That’s an important question when we, as the church, face similar taunts from the world, whether overt or subtle.

**Nehemiah didn’t respond – he prayed.** Nehemiah doesn’t get entangled in defending either himself or the people. He doesn’t even acknowledge what Sanballat and Tobiah have said; he’s silent on it. Sometimes the best response is no response. You’ve got to weigh up what will be achieved by getting involved, against the time and effort that will be soaked up in doing so. But it is not that Nehemiah does nothing – he prays and not for the first time. In fact, it’s the third time we are told about Nehemiah coming before the Lord in prayer (Nehemiah 1:4-11, 2:4), and it won't be the last.

In going to the Lord, Nehemiah is parking his ego, not that we get any sense that he had one, and taking the matter to the One who could deal with it. God was fully aware of what was being verbally thrown at Nehemiah and His people. Nehemiah knew that and, importantly, even though God’s name had not crossed the lips of either Sanballat or Tobiah, he also understood that this wasn’t primarily about either himself or the people; it was about God and His reputation, His glory. That is significant. Verse 5, “They have provoked **you** to anger in the presence of the builders”. That’s why he brought it to God, and humbly and reverently in essence prayed, ‘This is about your glory, please deal with it.’ So, to be clear, Nehemiah's prayer is not a personal expression of vengeance but in a similar vein to the ‘imprecatory’ Psalms; it is a request that seeks God’s formal vindication of His people, specifically for His glory.

We must consider this when it comes to engaging with those who ridicule and sneer at us, whether as individuals or in the church. Too often we are probably too quick to jump in and want to defend ourselves or the church. Now there are occasions when that is necessary, but, if we think that is appropriate, on every occasion we should speak with God first and then decide how to respond. If we did that more often, the outcome would undoubtedly be a better one.

Q1. What was Nehemiah’s response to ridicule?

Q2. Was his prayer motivated by personal vengeance?

**Tuesday - Nehemiah 4:1-9 – So we built the wall…… but**

“So we built the wall” – five words that say so much. The people gave themselves to the work as was spelled out in Chapter 3 and, as a result, the work progressed steadily until the wall was up to half of its previous height. It’s a real joy when the people of God collectively respond to a challenge and give themselves wholeheartedly to it. It requires solid, directive leadership, a clear understanding of what needs to be done to attain the agreed upon goal, and a shared desire to achieve it. It is possible, but sadly rare. When it does happen, the Lord blesses, and His name is truly glorified.

Sometimes we can be slow to notice the labours of others for the Lord; but one thing we can be sure of – they don’t go unnoticed by those who are opposed to it. When Sanballat and Tobiah realized that their words of ridicule and mockery had failed to achieve their goal, driven by anger they moved from ‘verbals’ to serious plotting. They also engaged others in their cause, which meant that Jerusalem was surrounded by those who were determined to stop what was happening. Sanballat and the Samaritans were in the north, Tobiah and the Ammonites covered the east, Geshem and the Arabs resided in the south, and the Ashdodites joined from the west to complete the encirclement of the city. Ashdod was probably the most important Philistine city and, given the history between them and Israel, they were certainly going to do everything in their power to thwart the resurgence of Jerusalem. But there was more to this than who’d have regional ‘influence’, and the resulting economic consequences; this is an attack by Satan on the eternal plan of God. Not that he knew the details of it, but he was determined to do all he could to prevent God from doing what He planned. So, secret talks are held between the emissaries of these nations and a pact is agreed to launch a military attack against Jerusalem. These guys are not messing about, the verbals are over.

It is ever the case that when the Lord’s work is being done, the world, even previously sworn enemies, will join in alliances to seek to destroy it (Psalm 2:1-9; Luke 23:12; Acts 4:23-30).

Nehemiah though, as all decent leaders do, has a sense of what is going on, and again neither carelessness nor laziness marks his response. He is focused on what must happen and directs the people to do two things; pray and set a guard to protect the city day and night. Ultimately, Nehemiah is really just a ‘one trick pony’ – first put the situation into God’s Hands and then take whatever appropriate and necessary commonsense steps you can to deal with the situation – what a good ‘one trick pony’ to be.

Q1. Is the world slow to take note of the Lord’s work?

Q2. When I used the term ‘one trick pony’ what was I referring to?

**Wednesday - Nehemiah 4:7-14 - Don’t let realism become pessimism.**

Yesterday, we saw how Nehemiah responded to the perceived and very real threat posed to Jerusalem by leading the people to pray, and at the same time setting a guard to protect the city. ‘Pray and guard’ must become the mantra of our lives in everything, and in that order. Pray for your husband or wife, and guard them. Pray for your family, and guard them with everything you have. Pray for the church, and do what you can to guard her, including supporting the decisions taken by the Session to protect her, even if at times not everything is spelled out to everyone. “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the whole armour of God….” (Ephesians 6:12,13). We must focus on the *visible* enemy, but PLEASE DO NOT lose sight of the *invisible* ones because they are the real orchestrators.

Praying and setting the guard achieved the goal of keeping the people focused on the task, but it didn’t eradicate the persistent cowering threat. And that’s the reality of our lives. We pray and we do believe that our prayers are heard and will be answered, but the incessant bombardment of the world does take a toll. The people in Judah were being impacted by the murmurings of what their enemies were planning to do. Rumours were being constantly fed into Jerusalem, through the deliberately well-placed leaks into the surrounding Jewish villages – verses 11 and 12. (‘Ten times’ is a Hebrew phrase meaning many times). So, discouragement was inevitable, and it was beginning to take a serious hold on the city; fear was becoming rife among the population.

Again, Nehemiah acts. There is no sitting back here to see what will develop. This is directive and purposeful, ‘claiming the agenda’ leadership. *First*, he arms the families and posts them according to their clans to defend the city close to their homes. Why clans? Because when it comes to it, people really only fight for those they love.

*The second thing he does* is to call on the people not to be afraid. This he does by telling them to “Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome.” (He also backed up his locating of the families with a call on them to fight for every individual in their family and their homes.)

The visible impact of these steps sends a message to Sanballat and his cohorts that their concerted attempts to discourage the people and lead to a stopping of the work had failed. Their plans frustrated, they backed off, and the threat level went down from red to amber.

Q1. What must we do to protect everyone in our lives?

Q2. Who must we remind ourselves of and why?

**Thursday – Nehemiah 4:15-23 – Our God will fight for us.**

Nehemiah’s clear directive purposeful leadership worked, “we all returned to the wall, each to his work.” But note to whom he gives the ultimate credit, “God had frustrated their plan”. Yes, leadership is given and yes, people follow wholeheartedly, but it is always the Lord who grants the escape, delivers the blessing, and gives the growth. If we ever think, let alone verbalize that it's because of our church leadership or our work as people, then we are done, for that is the first step along the road of idolatry, and that always ends in absolute disaster.

Sanballat and his ruthless allies may have backed off for now, but Nehemiah was certainly not going to stop praying nor let the city’s guard down. The work had to go on, and so the initial emergency measures had to be replaced with a defensive plan to cope with an attack at any time.

**There were six parts to the plan:**

1. A standing army comprising half of the men whom he identifies as ‘my servants’.
2. The supportive presence of the leaders.
3. Those working on the walls did so while at the same time being able to access their weapons, whether it was those carrying a burden who had their sword in their other hand or the builders who had their sword strapped to their side.
4. Importantly, the man who would give the warning through a blast on his trumpet always stayed with Nehemiah, so he could act immediately on his instruction.
5. He also instituted a night-shift guard squad comprising workers from the surrounding villages who were in the city for work.
6. He reminded them again that whatever happened they were not fighting by themselves – “Our God will fight for us”.

Yet again we see a man in Nehemiah who is prayerfully thinking about what is happening and what has to happen, and he plans for it. Then (verse 23) he gives himself to the task and he requires those closely associated with him to do the same. As one commentator writes of him, “He was a leader who served and a servant who led.” What a tremendous example for anyone who would either aspire to or already be in a leadership role. “Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain.” (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Q1. What stands out about Nehemiah’s leadership?

Q2. What did God remind the people of?

**Friday – Nehemiah 5:1-5 – A Great Outcry!**

During this week we have seen how the verbal and then the planned military attacks on Jerusalem by Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, and the Ashdodites failed effectively before they had been launched. But that wasn’t the end of Satan’s engagement with Jerusalem. It is remarkable how resilient the Devil is, especially given that he knows that he is doomed to spend eternity in the Lake of Fire that has been prepared for him. (Revelation 20:10). Having had his ‘external’ forces thwarted, he now turns his attention to those who are living in the city. As the great work in the city is ongoing (Nehemiah 4:19), a great cry arises among the people. But it’s not a cry for deliverance from attack for God – it’s a great outcry. Just when Nehemiah probably thinks to himself that he is going to get an opportunity to catch his breath following all the demands upon him, he is approached by groups of labourers and landowners with grievances. Note, this wasn’t simply a few alpha males letting off a bit of steam and expressing their unhappiness in the process; these men were accompanied in this confrontation by their wives because what was developing was bordering on matters of life and death.

The issue at the root of it all – the redirecting of manpower from working the fields to rebuilding the walls had resulted in a shortage of food. This situation was exacerbated by three things: the size of the labourer’s families – they were large; the inflationary pressures created by a famine meant that families who had property were having to mortgage it to get cash to purchase food; and then some had to borrow money to pay their taxes to the Persian King (Nehemiah’s boss). It wasn’t that they were all saying the same thing, but it all came together to form a perfect storm of grievance.

The eye of the storm was focused on one group though – “their Jewish brothers”. These were wealthy men who were exploiting the circumstances of their Jewish brothers and sisters by giving them loans but taking their land as property, enslaving their children as collateral, and charging interest, which was wrong – see Leviticus 25:39-40 and Deuteronomy 23:19-20. They were to treat one another with love, even when taking security (Exodus 22:25-27) or making a brother a servant (Leviticus 25:35-46). But they weren’t – they were taking advantage and abusing people. Not everyone in the church always has the best interests of others at heart, driven by self-interest even good men can be blinkered to wrongdoing on occasion to the hurt of the church.

Q1. What lay at the root of the outcry?

Q2. Who was causing the problem?