

Sermon – 08/02/2009 pm

Threats from Tiredness

Study Text: Nehemiah 4:10-15

How do you feel going off to work these days? The news we listen too is rather gloomy. All we hear about is the global economic crisis and global warming. Many fear that they will lose their jobs or homes. Others have seen their superannuation slashed. What does the future hold? It is easy to get discouraged.

The people building the walls of Jerusalem started to get discouraged. They started to get tired working on this massive job. And the constant threat from their enemies did not help. Someone put together a catchy little tune which they started to sing as they went off to work each day. 'The strength of the workers is failing and there is so much rubble we cannot rebuild the wall' (4:10). It was not an uplifting song but one that brought discouragement to the workers. How was Nehemiah going to deal with this latest threat?

Tiredness

The task of rebuilding the walls of the city was without doubt a massive undertaking. But with faith in God and with unity of purpose they were making progress. 'Nothing is impossible with God'. This should have been the song they sang as they went to work, and maybe it was in the beginning. They had a mind to work at that time.

The wall was half built – after three weeks or so of hard work. The half way stage is often the critical stage in a project. The initial enthusiasm begins to wane. The end still seems a long way off. And the body begins to grow weary. When the body gets weary doubts begin to enter. Weariness and doubt can be a tragic combination. The people were ready to give up.

We sometimes see this in the life of new believers. They rejoice in their new life in Christ. They attend every meeting they can as they are learning about Jesus and enjoying warm fellowship. But after a period of time the enthusiasm wears off. Maybe they come to testing time, but not necessarily. They just find it too hard to get along to worship. They just lose interest in reading the Bible. It is a dangerous time. It is a time to reflect and refocus on what it means to be a child of God.

Sometimes this falling away comes because of tiredness – physical tiredness. When young people leave home and have to fend for themselves they start working long hours. They get caught up in pressures of the workplace. They get up early and skip morning prayer. They come home tired and skip evening prayer. If they don't actually start working on the Lord's Day they are too tired to get up and come for worship.

The Lord made us to work six days a week not seven. One preacher recently said that if you do not take your Sabbath rest voluntarily you will be forced to take in soon enough – in hospital. Not that the workers on the wall of Jerusalem were working on the Sabbath. Nehemiah was a man of God who kept the Sabbath rest (13:15). It was just that the work on the wall was heavy manual labour and they were doing long hours. Of course it was not the tiredness *per se* but this discouraging little jingle that had caught on. The devil has many ways undermining the work of God.

Still we must take care that physical exhaustion does not make us irritable and spiritually vulnerable. Too often people excuse some outburst or some sin saying they were tired. If we are too tired to read our Bible and pray we are leaving the door open for the devil. The devil is the one who whispers those excuses, not God. It is the devil who tells you that you are too tired to go to church today and that you deserve a sleep in.

The wall was only half built and they were tempted to give up. You are still building the wall. You are still running the race. Do not give up. Jesus made it very clear that those who want to follow him must count the cost. If a man is going to build a tower he said does he not first sit down and decide if he is able to finish it (Luke 12:25f). Many wanted to follow him but he told them clearly that they must turn their backs upon this world. Whole hearted commitment, commitment to finishing the race, is essential in following Jesus.

Jesus did not promise an easy life. He said 'in this world you will have trouble'. 'In this world you will have difficulties and disappointments'. But listen to what else he said. He said *be of good cheer for I have overcome the world* (John 16:33). When we feel weak and when we feel discouraged we must come to Jesus.

Those who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength, they will mount up on wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint (Isaiah 40:31). Again in Isaiah 41:10 we read *fear not for I am with you, be not dismayed for I am your God, I will strengthen you, Yes I will help you, I will uphold you with my right hand.*

Threats Again

To the tiredness was added renewed threats from the enemies of the Jews. The devil does not hold back. Do you ever see lions take pity on their pray? The last threat of Sanballat and his allies was to attack Jerusalem and create confusion (4:8). The people prayed and set a watch. There was a lot of 'staring down the enemy' it seems but still Nehemiah had to take the threats seriously.

A rumour began to spread that the enemy was ready to launch a surprise attack. Just who started the rumour is not clear. It seems as if the information was meant to be overheard and passed on. The Jews who lived in the villages may have acted unwittingly in carrying this propaganda. They came to Nehemiah and told him ten times that the enemy was armed and ready to attack at any time.

While many Jews lived in the city others lived in the surrounding villages. They would have travelled in each day to work on the wall. They may have been targeted by the enemy and threatened in this way. If they could be discouraged then the rot would set in and spread. If they stopped working then others would soon follow.

Is this not what often happens in the church? The devil does not have to attack everyone. He can target just one or two who will then discourage everyone else. Soon the whole church is facing a crisis and its ministry threatened, all because of one or two disgruntled members.

Threat Countered

Nehemiah had to face this threat – just as we have to face it in the church. He had to act swiftly and decisively to stop the rot setting in. If some started to get scared or disillusioned and break ranks it would be disaster as far as the project was concerned. It was vital that all the people kept working together.

How did he do this? He got them to focus on the Lord. He got them together and told them not to be afraid but remember the Lord, the *great and awesome* God who called them to undertake this work (4:14). Remember the Lord and fight for your brethren. Do not fear the enemy and do not fail your friends and family.

I know Christians who have failed their families by chopping and changing churches while their children are growing up. Sometimes in frustration at not finding the perfect church the parents stop going all together. As the saying goes, if the church was not perfect before, it became even less so when you came! Remember the Lord; focus on Jesus and not yourself. And do not fail the brethren.

The *great and awesome* God was the focus of Nehemiah's initial prayer. He continues to trust this great God for the impossible. He knew that God had called him to rebuild the walls and refused to doubt the word of God.

Typical of Nehemiah he prayed and he also took action. He equipped the people with swords and spears (4:13). He had them stand behind the lowest part of the wall. Whether they were standing at the lowest parts to be seen by the enemy or to actually defend this part is not certain. It may well have been for both reasons.

He had them stand together in their family groups. Usually in battle brothers are not allowed to fight in the same unit – at least that is what my father said about his family in WW2. But these were desperate times in Jerusalem and Nehemiah called for desperate measures. He reasoned that families would fight hard to protect each other – besides there was no other command structure at this time. These were workers, not trained soldiers.

The enemy, seeing the Jews armed and ready to fight, realised the element of surprise was gone – or that their propaganda did not have the desired effect. The outcome was they withdrew in frustration. *God had brought their plot to nothing* said Nehemiah (4:15). He was always ready to give the glory to God because he knew that it was the Lord's doing. And so everyone returned to the wall, everyone to his work. May it be so with us in the work to which the Lord had called us to do.

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