

Staying the Course #10

Nehemiah 4: 15-23

Things are much different for Nehemiah than they were a few months ago, surrounded by the comforts of the palace. He has made the long journey to Jerusalem and began the great effort to rebuild the city walls. He certainly benefited from the commission of king Artaxerxes, but it did not prevent him from facing problems. His work was immediately met with resistance, and it seems at every turn the opposition is coming from a different angle.

In our last study we discovered that pessimism had begun to set in within the tribe of Judah. The work was difficult and demanding, and it seems as if some of the people are beginning to question whether they will be able to complete such an ambitious task. Yet again, as we have seen in the life of Nehemiah before, he rises to the challenge and leads the people to continue in the work.

As we study the book of Nehemiah we discover that adversity is continuous. As the people labor on the wall, there seems to be one hurdle after another to navigate. There are many similarities to the lives we live. We too face adversity and temptation to abandon the work. We need the desire and commitment Nehemiah had. Tonight as we continue our study, I want to consider the [disciplines of commitment](#) as we think on: [Staying the Course](#).

I. Their Supplication (9) – [Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them.](#) This was part of our text last time but I wanted to look back for just a moment to reemphasize the importance of prayer. Nehemiah had heard the complaint of Judah and responded to their concerns, but he is still in an attitude of prayer unto the Lord. I think it is safe to say that Nehemiah was in a continual state of prayer concerning the work they were engaged in. He knew that the people needed the guidance and provision of the Lord if they were to be successful in their efforts.

- You will have to agree that we need the Lord in our day as well. If we are to stay the course and prosper in the work we've been called to do, we need the Lord's direction and help. We need to continually be in an attitude of prayer, seeking the Lord to guide and strengthen us as we labor for Him. [1 Chron.16:11 – Seek the Lord and his strength, seek his face continually.](#)
[Ephes.6:18 – Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;](#)

II. Their Continuation (15) – It would've been easy to have given up on the task at hand, but Nehemiah and the workers were determined to continue for the Lord. Consider:

A. The Counsel Involved (15) – And it came to pass, when our enemies heard that it was known unto us, and God had brought their counsel to nought, that we returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work. They had faced intense opposition from Sanballat and the others, but the people refused to succumb to the pressures of the world. They chose to seek the counsel of God instead of the counsel of men. The opposition said they would never finish the work, the task was too great and they lacked the ability to complete it. Had they listened to the opposition they would have abandoned the work, but they chose to follow Nehemiah and the will of God.

- As the world considers the work that we are engaged in, many would say that we are foolish to continue. Many believe that the “religious” age in America is over. Many would argue that society no longer needs religion. (I would say they are right; we have never needed religion, but a relationship with the Lord.) However, we cannot allow the voice of opposition become the voice of reason regarding the work of the Lord. We must look to the Word of God as our guide and seek to live according to the standard He has set.

B. The Commitment Involved (15) – Sanballat and the others had spewed their pessimistic dialogue, but the workers simply returned to the work. They were well aware of the opposition; they knew they did not have the approval of the world, but they decided to press on for the Lord anyway. As we will see, the opposition did not cease, but neither did the work.

- I am sure you are aware that we will never receive the approval of this world, but that must not deter us from engaging in the work of the Lord. We have heard it before and the opposition and mockery will continue, but we must remain focused and committed. We must continue on in the work of the Lord regardless of what the world says or thinks!

I. Their Supplication (9)

II. Their Continuation (15)

III. Their Preparation (16-18) – As the opposition continued to mount, Nehemiah never strayed from the course. He considered the obstacles he faced and made preparations to get around the obstacles at hand. We notice a couple of things regarding their preparation.

A. The Diversity (16) – And it came to pass from that time forth, that the half of my servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons; and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah. This was not in the original plan, but Nehemiah was willing to diversify his efforts in order to be successful.

I am sure that he would rather had all the workers concentrating on the task at hand, but it became crucial to designate half of them as guards and watchmen.

- There is an important lesson to be learned here. It is often easy to become so focused on a particular aspect of ministry that we neglect another important and necessary element. Had they continued on as they were, it is possible that the work would have ceased all together. This would slow their progress, but it would ensure that the work continued.
- I have come to admire the leadership of Nehemiah. He was not afraid to make difficult decisions. He was not afraid of doing something different in order to accomplish the goal. There may be times when it is necessary to diversify our efforts to accomplish the goal. It will likely require approaching certain aspects of ministry differently at times, but we must be willing to make tough decisions in order to accomplish the work we are responsible for.

B. The Priority (17-18) – They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. [18] For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. And he that sounded the trumpet was by me. Nehemiah recognized the need for security and he addressed that, but he was focused on the main goal, completing the work. It became necessary for the workers to work with one hand and hold a weapon in the other, but the work did not cease. Nehemiah refused to be intimidated by fear and cease the rebuilding efforts. He was determined to finish the task he had started.

- In the day in which we live it is easy to get sidetracked and lose focus. There is so much that we must face. Our society is becoming increasingly less tolerant of the church. We are facing more opposition today than ever before. But, we cannot become so focused on the opposition that we fail to accomplish the work. It may be necessary to be more defensive, but we cannot allow that to consume our efforts. There is too much at stake. We must continue the task we began, regardless of the opposition! Our priority must be to honor the Lord with our worship and serve Him with our efforts. Many today are so caught up with opposing the opposition that they have lost their focus and are no longer productive in serving the Lord.

I. Their Supplication (9)

II. Their Continuation (15)

III. Their Preparation (16-18)

IV. Their Obligation (19-23) – These remaining verses deal with the obligation of Nehemiah and the others. This obligation was three-fold. They were obligated to:

A. Diligence (19, 21, 23) – And I said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, The work is great and large, and we are separated upon the wall, one far from another. [21] So we laboured in the work: and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared. [23] So neither I, nor my brethren, nor my servants, nor the men of the guard which followed me, none of us put off our clothes, saving that every one put them off for washing.

Nehemiah emphasized the need for the work to continue. They must let nothing stand in their way. The work on the wall must continue regardless of opposition or hardship. They were so committed that they didn't even remove their clothes, expect to wash them. They diligently labored on the wall.

- We need that same diligence in our day as well. I would love to see what we could accomplish if we all decided to make the Lord our number one priority. The work is too great for a half-hearted effort. We will never accomplish what the Lord desires of us with part time engagement. This is something that we must commit to every day that we live.

B. Defense (20, 22) – In what place therefore ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us: our God shall fight for us. [22] Likewise at the same time said I unto the people, Let every one with his servant lodge within Jerusalem, that in the night they may be a guard to us, and labour on the day. Nehemiah anticipated future incident with the enemy. He knew they would come again. He wanted the city to be prepared to defend against such an attack. He prepared the workers and developed a plan. When the alarm sounded, all the city would come together to defend against attack. This would ensure their defense, even if the attack was launched against a weak area in the wall. They were obligated to stand together and defend each other.

- We too are obligated to stand together. The adversary is like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. A lion likes to attack the weak and venerable. We have an obligation to our children and those who are weak spiritually to stand alongside them and help defend them against attack.
- If we are to overcome, we must be willing to stand together, united. If the enemy can separate us and create division, he is more apt to defeat us. We are all in this effort together. We must have the will of God and the good of the church at heart. United we can stand, but divided we will likely fall.

C. Dependence (20b) – [our God shall fight for us](#). Nehemiah knew the strength of the enemy and the areas that they were weak. He reminded the people that they must have faith in the Lord and depend on Him. In their ability, they would never overcome, but trusting in the Lord and allowing Him to fight for them, they would be victorious.

- With all the opposition we face, we too must lean upon the Lord and allow Him to fight our battles for us. There are times when we will be called upon to stand in defense of our faith and doctrine, but we must always be aware that it is God who secures the victory. If we are to overcome and be profitable for the Lord, we must allow Him to fight for us.
- There will be times when we just need to get out of the way and allow God to work in our midst. There are issues that we will be unable to resolve, but God can accomplish that which He pleases. Sometimes it is better to wait patiently upon the Lord than to charge into a situation. Quite often He will work things out if we will only give Him time.

As we close tonight I would like to challenge each of us to stay the course. Serving the Lord isn't always easy, but we can accomplish His will if we will stay committed to the work He has called us to. There is no place to back down or quit. We must continue on in the labor until He calls us home.

If you are facing adversity in your personal journey, may I encourage you to seek the Lord and His guidance? He desires each of us to be successful in the work and He will provide all that we need if we'll only trust Him.

If you have never been saved, then you have not yet begun this wonderful journey. Jesus died so that you might be saved. If you have never trusted Christ in salvation, I urge you to come to Him and receive that precious gift that only He can give!