

Celebration Mixed with Contention # 17

Nehemiah 6: 15-19

As we continue our study this evening, we have come to the moment that Nehemiah and all those who labored on the wall had waited for. After much opposition, internal conflict, and countless hours of labor, the wall was finally complete. I am sure that they were all overjoyed with a sense of pride and fulfillment as the last stone was laid in the wall. Weeks of labor, much of which had been done with a weapon in one hand, had paid off and the wall surrounding the city was complete.

At such a time as this, one would certainly expect an atmosphere of celebration. The people had stood together, working tirelessly toward a common goal, fulfilling their task. However, their time of jubilation was soon met with more opposition and contention. I tend to believe that the people were not really surprised by the opposition of the adversary. In fact, it would appear that they expected it.

As we consider the account of the completion of the wall, we once again discover a common theme that has been prevalent throughout the book of Nehemiah. We can never expect the enemy to be happy with our progress and we need to look for continued opposition and resistance as long as we seek to accomplish anything of value for the Lord. I want to consider the [emotions](#) of that day as we think on: [Celebration Mixed with Contention](#).

I. A Day of Rejoicing (15) – [So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days.](#) Nehemiah doesn't specifically mention any celebration by the people, but it stands to reason that there would have been an attitude of celebration and rejoicing. Let's consider a couple of aspects regarding their reason for rejoicing. Consider:

A. The Reality of the Work – Nehemiah does reveal the time frame in which the monumental task was completed. The people finished the wall in 52 days. Had they worked on average five days per week, it would've taken around 10 weeks to complete. He also speaks of completion in the month Elul, just nine short months from the time he first heard of the great need in Jerusalem. God had blessed His people abundantly and enabled them to finish the great task in record time.

- The reality in Jerusalem bears a word of caution however. I am confident that God still enables His people to accomplish His will, but we must be cautious as we approach the work of the Lord. There are times in ministry where victory comes rather quickly. At other times it may appear that we have labored for an extended period of time with little to show.

- Whatever the circumstance, we must maintain the attitude and commitment Nehemiah had. If God has revealed a work for us to do, we must continue until the work is complete.

B. The Resistance in the Work – When we consider all that the people endured during the reconstruction effort, the time in which they completed the wall seems more miraculous. They had faced continued opposition from Sanballat and his associates. This slowed them down tremendously. They were forced to appoint half of the people to stand guard while the rest actually did the work. During part of the effort, they were forced to hold a weapon as they worked, slowing the work dramatically. Judah had doubted and surely discouraged many. We discovered the uproar over greed that Nehemiah was forced to confront. All of this created a great hindrance in the work, and yet God allowed them to rise above and complete the wall.

- When we are engaged in the work of the Lord, it isn't a question of if, but when regarding opposition. As we consider all that Scripture records concerning the many victories God's people enjoyed, opposition was usually present. Our generation is no different. We face the same adversary that all previous generations faced. But, we need not be discouraged; we also serve the same Lord they served. Opposition will come, but God is able to strengthen us to overcome whatever we face to accomplish His will.

I. A Day of Rejoicing (15)

II. A Day of Remorse (16) – *And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God.* Nehemiah reveals that all did not join in the celebration. In fact some were quite disturbed at the completion of the wall. Notice:

A. The People Revealed – We find that those who opposed the work, surrounding the city, were not pleased with the triumph in Jerusalem. Nehemiah described them as *the enemies and the heathen*. He was speaking of Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem, those who followed their leadership, as well as the neighboring people who opposed the work of the Lord.

- There is a great hatred for the work of the Lord in our society. Many don't mind those who are religious. They don't mind those who participate in a form of religion, but they hate those who are committed to serving the Lord Jesus Christ. Sadly, we don't have to leave our own communities to find them. We are surrounded by enemies of the cross and the heathen of our day.

- The attributes that characterized those of Nehemiah's day have not changed. The **enemies** represent all who are *opposed* to the Lord and His work. You will have to admit that we are surrounded by those who oppose the Lord and His work. The **heathen** speak of *those who live in unbelief*. Our world is filled with those who argue that our faith is based on a myth. They may acknowledge some sort of higher being, but they refuse to believe in God or the sacrifice and resurrection of His Son. Opposition is rooted in unbelief, and unbelief causes opposition. The two are virtually inseparable.

B. The Perception Disclosed – Those who opposed the work were forced to acknowledge the hand of God in the work. **They were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God.** They had bought into the false doctrine and hatred of Sanballat and the others, but in the end they were forced to accept truth. This was hard to swallow, but the wall stood as undeniable proof of the power of God and the resilience of His people. Can you imagine how hard this must've been to accept? They had mocked the people, claiming they would never finish the task, and even if they did, it wouldn't last. And yet, right there before their eyes, they saw a completed wall as God's people rejoiced.

- This brings to mind a great burden for the believer. We are surrounded by those who are filled with pride, believing the lies of Satan. They refuse to believe there is anything to our faith. They refuse to admit that they will stand before a holy God accountable for their sin. They are convinced they can live as they please without future consequence. **Philip.2:10-11 – That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; [11] And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.** Sadly for many, their confession will be too late as they are separated from God unto eternal torment and condemnation.

I. A Day of Rejoicing (15)

II. A Day of Remorse (16)

III. A Day of Rebellion (17-19) – Nehemiah realized that there was not only a sense of remorse, but a genuine attitude of rebellion among many of the people. Let's take a moment to consider the characteristics of those who rebelled against the work of God. Notice:

A. Their Identity (17) – **Moreover in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters unto Tobiah, and the letters of Tobiah came unto them.** The rebellion was comprised of the nobles of Judah,

those who should've supported Nehemiah and the reconstruction efforts. They should've been seeking to encourage the others in the work rather than seeking their defeat.

- This reminds us that all are not what they appear. I fear that our churches are filled with those who appear to be loyal to the Lord and the church, but deep down they have no desire for the things of God or the prosperity of the church. Many are even in places of leadership and authority and abuse their influence, becoming a hindrance instead of help.

B. Their Quantity (18) – For there were many in Judah sworn unto him, because he was the son in law of Shechaniah the son of Arah; and his son Johanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah. This was not an isolated issue, contained within a select few. There were many that had sworn their allegiance to Tobiah, a staunch enemy of the work. We can be certain that Nehemiah was deeply troubled by the treason of many of the Jews.

- As with much we have studied thus far, things have changed very little. As you study the nation of Israel, the life of Christ, and the history of the church, you discover much opposition to the few who genuinely sought to serve the Lord. Christ came unto His own, and His own received Him not. Thousands upon thousands were saved as the church was born, but great masses stood in opposition of the Gospel. Throughout the centuries to come, countless Christians were persecuted and killed for their faith.
- As a young boy growing up, it appeared that the majority at least was favorable toward the church. But those days have ceased to exist, even in America. We are greatly outnumbered by the opposition. That is why it is so important for the church to stand for truth and boldly proclaim it at every opportunity.

C. Their Loyalty (17-18a) – As I read this passage I was amazed at what it revealed. Nehemiah had been sent of the Lord from Persia under the authority of Artaxerxes. The wall was completed in an unbelievably short time. You would think that the majority would have rallied around Nehemiah and supported him and the work. That was not the case for many. Even though it was clear that God had performed a great work among them, they remained loyal to Tobiah and the opposition. Some were loyal due to family ties. The passage doesn't reveal what other factors played into their treason, but I would believe that it involved power, prestige, and money. Many chose that which appealed to the flesh over loyalty to God.

- We don't need a lengthy discussion on that matter, but we all know that many are influenced by the same factors. Simply put, those who are not close to God seek the things of the flesh. Many today are lost in their sin and seek to serve the master of the flesh. Some may have been born again, but are so carnal that they are determined to satisfy the flesh.

- Each of us will be loyal to one or the other. We cannot serve God and mammon.

D. Their Immorality (18b) – For there were many in Judah sworn unto him, because he was the son in law of Shechaniah the son of Arah; and his son Johanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah. It is apparent that the Jews were intermarrying with those of surrounding nations. This was forbidden by the law of God. He expected them to marry from among the people of Judah. This reveals much more than a few marriages outside the bounds of God's Word. It reveals a total disregard on the part of many concerning the Word and will of God. It displays their determination to satisfy the flesh even though God had specifically forbidden certain practices. If they disregarded God's law concerning marriage, we can be certain that many other standards had been forsaken as well.

- This is likely one of the greatest parallels to our day. Very little thought is given any more to the holy standard of God. People live and behave as they please, with a total disregard for God's Word. We live in a society that is consumed with pleasing the flesh and will stop at nothing to accomplish their goal.

E. Their Tenacity (19) – Also they reported his good deeds before me, and uttered my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to put me in fear. These were relentless in their rebellion toward Nehemiah and the work of the Lord. They were in constant communication with Tobiah and even sought to discourage Nehemiah, seeking to create fear in his heart and proclaiming their loyalty to Tobiah. They were determined to continue in their opposition and make certain that Nehemiah and the others were aware of their continued opposition.

- We must be aware that we face tenacious adversaries. They are committed to their cause and will stop at nothing to achieve their goals. Many used to work "behind the scenes" in their opposition of the church, but many now openly display their opposition and rebellion. It seems as if they are almost daring the church to take a stand against their sinful corruption.
- Difficulty will remain and continue to increase, but we cannot allow that to hinder our work for the Lord. We must remain steadfast, continuing the work we are called to do!

Clearly this was a day of celebration mixed with contention. The people hadn't hardly enjoyed the moment until the opposition came again. We might as well expect opposition and prepare for it. We have one thing on our side that the world does not have: the Lord and His power. We do not have to resign to defeat. Look to the Lord for strength to remain in the work. He is able and willing to provide. We cannot abandon the work; there is too much at stake!