

How our Focus Affects our Future

Nehemiah 4: 1-3; 10-12; 14

Nehemiah is one of the lesser known books and characters of the Bible, and yet the account of his life and accomplishments stand as a great challenge and testimony to all believers. These events take place after the captivity in Babylon. The first group had already returned to Jerusalem under the direction of Zerubbabel. Some 80 years later Ezra led a group back to Jerusalem and during that campaign one of Nehemiah's brothers returned with desperate news from Jerusalem. This touched the heart of Nehemiah to return himself.

We need to understand that Nehemiah held a high and prestigious position as the Cupbearer of King Artaxerxes of Persia. He was loved and cared for by the king. It would've been easy for Nehemiah to have desired to stay in Persia rather than risk his life in the efforts at Jerusalem.

When Nehemiah arrives at Jerusalem and surveys the need, he finds great devastation and opposition. This would certainly be no easy task. In our text Nehemiah deals with voices of opposition and voices of discouragement. It seemed as if everyone had a perspective on the work at hand.

Nehemiah had a perspective that differed from the viewpoint of others. As we consider these three different viewpoints, we discover the outlook that our perspective promotes. I want to look at the [principles](#) in the text concerning: [How our Focus Affects our Future](#).

I. The Animosity from Without (1-3) – The first voice we hear reflects the animosity from without. Sanballat and Tobiah cast their voices in opposition to the work of Nehemiah and the Jews. Notice:

A. Their Anger (1) – [But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews.](#)

Clearly Sanballat was not pleased with the efforts of Nehemiah and the others. He was *hot, furious, and enraged with anger*. His anger brought about mockery, as he belittled the Jews and their efforts.

- Sanballat was the governor of Samaria and he feared the Jews gaining power and diminishing his power and influence. He simply did not want the Jews in Jerusalem and he certainly didn't want them to prosper.

- We are far removed from the days of Nehemiah, but the same issues remain in our day. There are those who oppose the Lord, His church, and anything related to the Lord. They would rather that the church didn't exist, and if it must, then they clearly don't want us to prosper. They don't want us to influence society or seek to promote the cause of Christ within the community. I can assure you, if you take a stand for the Lord against the ways of this world, you will find opposition and anger.

I. The Animosity from Without (1-3)

A. Their Anger (1)

B. Their Accusations (2) – And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned? Sanballat wanted to convince himself that they would never succeed in rebuilding Jerusalem. He accused the Jews of being:

1. Feeble – What do these feeble Jews? Will they fortify themselves? Sanballat claimed that they lacked the strength and ability to be productive. He saw them as

feeble, frail, miserable, powerless, withered, and weak. They had been in captivity for 70 years. They were few in number in Jerusalem. They had no economic or military might. From all appearances these were a “ragtag” group with little hope of achieving anything.

- The Jews may have been weak; they had endured a season of judgment, but their God had not lost His power. He may have chastised them for their sin, but He remained in control of their lives. The Jews’ strength was not within themselves, but in the Lord.

B. Their Accusations (2)

1. Feeble

2. Foolish – *will they sacrifice?* Now Sanballat taunted their God and the relationship they had with Him. Will they continue to serve the Lord and depend on Him to build their city? Sanballat suggested that it would take more than the God of Israel to rebuild the city.

- Are we not viewed in much the same way today? The world sees no benefit in serving the Lord. They wonder why we continue to worship and serve One whom we have never seen. Those who deny God’s existence refuse to believe that He is a God of power and compassion. The world sees us as weak, frail, and foolish for believing in our Lord. *****

3. Failures – will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned? Sanballat viewed it as a hopeless cause. He believed they were foolish to believe that the city would ever be rebuilt. Could they possibly restore the city from such ruin? In his mind these miserable Jews were just failures without enough sense to know the difference.

- This world views the modern Christian the same way. They refuse to believe that there is anything to our faith. They refuse to believe in the Word of God or His promises to His people. They deny the existence of heaven and hell. They refuse to embrace life beyond the grave. Why do we spend our lives serving the Lord? If God is real then why is the world and society in the condition it currently is? The world views a life lived for Jesus a waste.

I. The Animosity from Without (1-3)

A. Their Anger (1)

B. Their Accusations (2)

C. Their Assumption (3) – Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall.

They assumed that all of the efforts of the Jews were in

vain. They refused to believe that the work or wall would last.

- There were scoffers in Nehemiah's day. There were doubters in the days of the early church. The naysayers remain today. They assume that this is all a fairy tale. They see no value in accepting Christ and living for Him. One day our faith will end in sight. The work and will of God will endure!

I. The Animosity from Without (1-3)

II. The Apprehension from Within (10-12) – The next voice we hear comes from within, the voice of Judah. It really doesn't bother me when those without the church speak words of doubt and dismay. We can expect that; they don't know the Lord. However, it does trouble me when the voices of doubt and division come from within. Sadly, this happens more frequently than it should. Let's consider the voice of apprehension from within.

A. They Spoke of Weakness (10a) – And Judah said, **The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall.** Judah, one of the prominent and influential tribes among the people, declared that there was no strength to continue. They saw it as a hopeless cause. They simply felt as if there wasn't enough

strength to continue. They were ready to throw in the towel and abandon the effort altogether.

II. The Apprehension from Within (10-12)

A. They Spoke of Weakness (10a)

B. They Spoke of Weariness (10b) – *and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall.* Judah viewed the task as one that was impossible to accomplish. There was just too much rubbish and refuge in the way. It seemed as if there was no way they would ever be able to rebuild the wall and secure the city.

- There are those within the church today who are weary in the work. They have surveyed the task at hand and see it as impossible. They have grown weary from past labor and simply cannot find the strength to continue.
- That is exactly how the adversary wants us to feel. He wants us to see our labor as a hopeless cause. He wants us to see a task that is impossible to fulfill. He wants us to lack faith that God is still able to move mountains.
- We are not laboring in our own ability. The task is too great for us to perform in ourselves, but it is too worthy to abandon. We must find the strength we need

to press on in the fight. That strength is only found in the Lord.

II. The Apprehension from Within (10-12)

A. They Spoke of Weakness (10a)

B. They Spoke of Weariness (10b)

C. They Spoke of With-drawl (11-12) – And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease. And it came to pass, that when the Jews which dwelt by them came, they said unto us ten times, From all places whence ye shall return unto us they will be upon you. The enemy put fear within their hearts. They feared their attack and the battle they might face. The Jews began to believe the words of Sanballat and Tobiah. They began to doubt their ability as well as God's power and ability. They were ready to abandon the work and desert Jerusalem.

- Many are no longer attending church or serving the Lord because they viewed their labor as impossible. They were weak and weary and chose not to fight another battle. They felt as if there was nothing left to stand for.

- Church that is exactly what the enemy wants us to believe. He wants to place fear and doubt within our hearts. We cannot abandon the work or flee the fight. There is too much at stake!

I. The Animosity from Without (1-3)

II. The Apprehension from Within (10-12)

III. The Assurance from Above (14) – And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses. Nehemiah had heard the voices from without and the voices from within. There was little hope or encouragement from either, but these were not the only voices to be heard. I am convinced that Nehemiah received a word from above. Notice:

A. He Spoke of Courage – Be not afraid. Things may have looked bad on the surface; it may have seemed as if all hope was gone, but God was still in control. There was nothing to fear as long as He was in their midst!
Rom.8:31 – What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? 1 Jn.4:4 – Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them:

because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. Is.41:10 – Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.

III. The Assurance from Above (14)

A. He Spoke of Courage

B. He Spoke of Confidence – remember the Lord, which is great and terrible. Nehemiah reminded them to whom they belonged. God had allowed their captivity, but yet He had kept them through it all. They served the Almighty God. He had brought the people out of Egypt with a mighty strong hand. He had delivered them from the enemies in Canaan. Now He had allowed them to return to Jerusalem. They were secure in the Lord!

- When it seems as if the world is gaining the upper hand, look to Jesus. When it appears that you are facing certain defeat, trust in the Lord. He has not brought us this far to abandon us now. There is a lot that I am uncertain about, but my Lord is not in that category. I am safe and secure in Him!

C. He Spoke of Commitment

C. He Spoke of Commitment – and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses. There was too much at stake to lose this battle. Failure was not an option. Their families and their future depended on their success. This was not just about their feelings or priorities; the future of the nation rested upon them.

- We need that same commitment. There is too much at stake in our day. Our children need a place to find help and direction for their lives. They need a place of shelter from the world. There are those who have never heard of Jesus that need us to continue so they too might be saved. Our community and our nation need the church to remain strong. We cannot quit; we cannot relax, and we cannot fail!

There are many voices being heard today. Which voice will you heed? Will you listen to the voices from without, within, or above? I want to heed the voice from above and follow the direction of God.