

SERMON FOCUS: I must trust God for protection from the enemy.

SERMON FUNCTION: The hearer will prayerfully trust in God even in the face of overwhelming odds.

BACKGROUND:

Last week, we saw Nehemiah's arrival in Jerusalem and his reconnaissance mission to see how bad the damage was. He then inspired the Jews to start rebuilding the walls by telling them that God was on their side. Nehemiah also stood up to those who opposed him. Chapter 3, which you should read on your own, tells about who built which gates and which sections of wall. We're going to skip past that and look at Chapter 4 today.

SCRIPTURE READING: Nehemiah 4:1-23

When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became furious. He mocked the Jews **2** before his colleagues and the powerful men of Samaria and said, "What are these pathetic Jews doing? Can they restore it by themselves? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they ever finish it? Can they bring these burnt stones back to life from the mounds of rubble?" **3** Then Tobiah the Ammonite, who was beside him, said, "Indeed, even if a fox climbed up what they are building, he would break down their stone wall!"

4 Listen, our God, for we are despised. Make their insults return on their own heads and let them be taken as plunder to a land of captivity. **5** Do not cover their guilt or let their sin be erased from your sight, because they have angered the builders.

6 So we rebuilt the wall until the entire wall was joined together up to half its height, for the people had the will to keep working.

7 When Sanballat, Tobiah, and the Arabs, Ammonites, and Ashdodites heard that the repair to the walls of Jerusalem was progressing and that the gaps were being closed, they became

furious. **8**They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and throw it into confusion. **9**So we prayed to our God and stationed a guard because of them day and night.

10In Judah, it was said:

The strength of the laborer fails,
since there is so much rubble.

We will never be able
to rebuild the wall.

11And our enemies said, “They won’t realize it until we’re among them and can kill them and stop the work.” **12**When the Jews who lived nearby arrived, they said to us time and again,

“Everywhere you turn, they attack us.” **13**So I stationed people behind the lowest sections of the wall, at the vulnerable areas. I stationed them by families with their swords, spears, and bows.

14After I made an inspection, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials, and the rest of the people, “Don’t be afraid of them. Remember the great and awe-inspiring Lord, and fight for your countrymen, your sons and daughters, your wives and homes.”

15When our enemies heard that we knew their scheme and that God had frustrated it, every one of us returned to his own work on the wall. **16**From that day on, half of my men did the work while the other half held spears, shields, bows, and armor. The officers supported all the people of Judah, **17**who were rebuilding the wall. The laborers who carried the loads worked with one hand and held a weapon with the other. **18**Each of the builders had his sword strapped around his waist while he was building, and the one who sounded the ram’s horn was beside me. **19**Then I said to the nobles, the officials, and the rest of the people, “The work is enormous and spread out, and we are separated far from one another along the wall. **20**Wherever you hear the sound of the ram’s horn, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us!” **21**So we continued the work, while half of the men were holding spears from daybreak until the stars came out. **22**At that time, I also said to the people, “Let everyone and his servant spend the night inside Jerusalem, so that they can stand guard by night and work

by day.” [23](#)And I, my brothers, my servants, and the men of the guard with me never took off our clothes. Each carried his weapon, even when washing.

INTRODUCTION:

This is such a strange time to be alive. NASA’s Webb telescope has captured some breathtaking pictures of the universe. These pictures are amazing, and to me show in even better detail, the level of God’s creative power. At the same time, we have Senator Elizabeth Warren calling to shut down crisis pregnancy centers, which outnumber abortion clinics 3:1. And we have a UC Berkeley law professor in Senate hearings using the term, “people with the capacity for pregnancy,” then accusing a Senator who questioned the term of being “transphobic” and “causing violence.” Things are not getting any better. People with our beliefs and values are going to face more and more problems in the coming years. On this, we can learn from Nehemiah’s handling of the situation he faced.

MESSAGE:

1. I WILL BE MOCKED

- a. (4:1-3) Sanballat calls the Jews pathetic. He doesn’t believe that they or their God are actually capable of doing the work they’ve set to do.
- b. Sanballat and Tobiah want to get in their heads to make them give up before they get very far.
- c. They point out the condition of the stones, which had been burnt. Burning had cracked and ruined the limestone.
- d. How many remember hearing about the “Tokyo Rose” radio broadcasts during WWII?
- e. The same idea is at play here. It is a campaign to demotivate the workers and get them to give up.
- f. The rebuilding already seemed like an insurmountable task.

- g. Remember last week that the rubble was so bad in at least one section of the wall that Nehemiah couldn't get his animal through.
- h. What is it in your life that seems impossible? That's where God does his best work. But, of course, He requires that we do work.

2. THE ENEMY WILL PLOT AGAINST ME

- a. (4:7-8) When Sanballat, Tobiah, and the Arabs, Ammonites, and Ashdodites heard that the repair to the walls of Jerusalem was progressing and that the gaps were being closed, they became furious. They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and throw it into confusion.
- b. When mocking the Jews wasn't enough, Sanballat and his crew began to plan a fight.
- c. We do not know if they actually would have fought, because King Artaxerxes had sent Nehemiah to do this work. But the threat was certainly there.
- d. We do know, however, that Nehemiah and his crew were praying while they were working. They were trusting in God for what He had told them to do.
- e. Because they were seeking God's will and doing His work, the builders were provided with His protection. God ensured that the plot was found out.
- f. Nehemiah addressed the plot and the work continued. He had to prepare them to fight.

3. I MUST BE ARMED

- a. (4:16) From that day on, half of my men did the work while the other half held spears, shields, bows, and armor.
- b. Nehemiah's people were prepared to defend themselves from attack.

- c. Half of the people were now carrying spears, shields, bows, and armor. These were standing guard to protect the workers.
- d. Even the builders were carrying swords, and never set them down.
- e. These men were prepared for an attack that had been threatened. They were determined to keep doing what God had called them to.

(Eph. 6:10-17) Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by his vast strength. **11**Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the schemes of the devil. **12**For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens. **13**For this reason take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having prepared everything, to take your stand. **14**Stand, therefore, with truth like a belt around your waist, righteousness like armor on your chest, **15**and your feet sandaled with readiness for the gospel of peace. **16**In every situation take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. **17**Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit — which is the word of God.

- a. Notice the defensive nature of the weapons Paul describes.
 - a. Righteousness like armor
 - b. Shield of faith
 - c. Helmet of Salvation
 - d. Sword of the Spirit—which is the word of God. (remember “sword drills”)
- b. These weapons are our defense against the enemy’s attacks.
- c. Ultimately, it is not up to us to defeat the enemy. God has already taken care of that.

4. ULTIMATELY, GOD THWARTS THE PLANS OF HIS ENEMIES

- a. (4:15) When our enemies heard that we knew their scheme and that God had frustrated it...
- b. Who defeated the enemies' plan?
- c. There is no indication that Sanballat and his crew actually attacked. They apparently knew they were beaten already.
- d. In this case, it was not up to Nehemiah to defeat Sanballat and gang; God handled them with a show of force.
- e. (Judges 7) God showed up for Gideon to defeat the Midianites.
- f. (2 Chronicles 20) God showed up for Jehoshaphat to defeat the Ammonites, Moabites, and the inhabitants of Mount Seir who had come together to attack Jerusalem.
- g. The ultimate defeat of God's enemies has already been written.

(Rev 19:11-21) Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse. Its rider is called Faithful and True, and with justice he judges and makes war. His eyes were like a fiery flame, and many crowns were on his head. He had a name written that no one knows except himself. He wore a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called the Word of God. The armies that were in heaven followed him on white horses, wearing pure white linen. A sharp sword came from his mouth, so that he might strike the nations with it. He will rule them with an iron rod. He will also trample the winepress of the fierce anger of God, the Almighty. And he has a name written on his robe and on his thigh: King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he called out in a loud voice, saying to all the birds flying high overhead, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of military commanders, the flesh of the mighty, the flesh of horses and of their riders, and the flesh of everyone, both free and slave, small and great."

Then I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies gathered together to wage war against the rider on the horse and against his army. But the beast was taken prisoner, and along with it the false prophet, who had performed the signs in its presence. He deceived those who accepted the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image with these signs. Both of them were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. The rest were killed with the sword that came from the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds ate their fill of their flesh.

- h. Note that there is no mention of the King's army actually fighting. The enemies are defeated by "the sword that came from the mouth of the rider on the horse." (Rev. 19:21)

CONCLUSION:

1. Does it seem that the enemy is mocking you? Maybe not you personally, but your faith? As Christians, we are no longer the dominant culture in the West. The people who surround us mock our God, our values, our beliefs, and our lifestyle. Some of those may be in your own family. Remember, God hears us when we are being mocked.
2. God hears us when people plot evil against us. Don't hear this to mean that bad things will never happen to us. But we must remember that God is in control, and whatever He allows to happen to us happens with His purpose in mind. Ultimately, we are delivered from the plans of the evil one.
3. Remember that God wins in the end. His victory was secured at the cross and proven at the resurrection. He won already; we have nothing to add to that. All we have to do is to accept it. Who will accept Him today?

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