

SERMON FOCUS: I must not be distracted from the work that God has called me to do.

SERMON FUNCTION: The hearer will exercise discernment in knowing which interruptions are from God and which ones are not.

BACKGROUND: For the past four weeks, we have been looking at Governor Nehemiah's call to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem. We met his big three opponents: Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem. These three tried to stop the work on the wall because they feared that they would lose power and wealth. Last week, we looked at those among the Jews who were taking advantage of the poor among them, and we saw how Nehemiah handled that situation. Today, we see that Nehemiah's opponents are still trying to stop his work on the wall. Let's pick up with Chapter 6, verse 1.

SCRIPTURE READING: Nehemiah 6:1-19

When Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall and that no gap was left in it— though at that time I had not installed the doors in the city gates — **2**Sanballat and Geshem sent me a message: “Come, let's meet together in the villages of the Ono Valley.” They were planning to harm me.

3So I sent messengers to them, saying, “I am doing important work and cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?” **4**Four times they sent me the same proposal, and I gave them the same reply.

5Sanballat sent me this same message a fifth time by his aide, who had an open letter in his hand. **6**In it was written:

It is reported among the nations — and Geshem agrees — that you and the Jews plan to rebel. This is the reason you are building the wall. According to these reports, you are to become their king **7**and have even set up the prophets in Jerusalem to proclaim on your behalf, “There is a king in Judah.” These rumors will be heard by the king. So come, let’s confer together.

8Then I replied to him, “There is nothing to these rumors you are spreading; you are inventing them in your own mind.” **9**For they were all trying to intimidate us, saying, “They will drop their hands from the work, and it will never be finished.”

But now, my God, strengthen my hands.

10I went to the house of Shemaiah son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel, who was restricted to his house. He said:

Let’s meet at the house of God,

inside the temple.

Let’s shut the temple doors

because they’re coming to kill you.

They’re coming to kill you tonight!

11But I said, “Should a man like me run away? How can someone like me enter the temple and live?^a I will not go.” **12**I realized that God had not sent him, because of the prophecy he spoke against me. Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. **13**He was hired, so that I would be intimidated, do as he suggested, sin, and get a bad reputation, in order that they could discredit me.

14My God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat for what they have done, and also the prophetess Noadiah and the other prophets who wanted to intimidate me.

15The wall was completed in fifty-two days, on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul. **16**When all our enemies heard this, all the surrounding nations were intimidated and lost their confidence, for they realized that this task had been accomplished by our God.

17During those days, the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them. **18**For many in Judah were bound by oath to him, since he was a son-in-law of Shecaniah son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam son of Berechiah. **19**These nobles kept mentioning Tobiah's good deeds to me, and they reported my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to intimidate me.

INTRODUCTION:

Have you ever been caught where you weren't supposed to be? At my first unit, we had a Marine who was on convalescent leave, supposed to be at home. One of our gunnery sergeants was on leave, in New Orleans, at Mardi Gras, and ran smack into her partying like crazy. She said, and I quote, "You didn't see me!" But he did. And her discharge paperwork went through pretty quickly after he came back to the unit.

God has a purpose for where He has placed us. It is important that we be where He wants us to be.

MESSAGE:

1. I MUST BE WHERE GOD WANTS ME TO BE (6:1-4)
 - a. **Physically present!**
 - b. Nehemiah knew that God wanted him to be constructing the wall. He didn't let the invitation to go out into the country for a couple of days get in his way.

- c. We do not know if Sanballat and Geshem planned to kill Nehemiah while he was away or attack the city while he was gone. Either would have been disastrous.
- d. It sounds like they wanted him to think this was a friendly getaway. Nehemiah knew better.
 - i. Experience?
 - ii. Revelation?
 - iii. Common Sense?
- e. He used the work that they were trying to get him to stop as his excuse for not going.
- f. These two were persistent in trying to get Nehemiah away from what he was supposed to be doing.
- g. Distractions in our life can be just as frequent and persistent.
 - i. Busyness.
 - ii. Tiredness.
 - iii. Entertainment can be a major distraction in our lives.
- h. Mentally present**
 - i. Sometimes it can be difficult to pay attention to those sitting in the room with you.
 - ii. Has anyone ever gone to visit a grandparent who keeps the TV on very loud?
 - iii. Has anyone ever sat in a group where everyone was just looking at their phones?
 - iv. We are meant to be in relationship to each other, and that requires being mentally present and paying attention.
- i. I must be physically and mentally present in my work, my home, my church, and all my relationships. If I am distracted from these, I am not loving well, which is something that Christ clearly commands. If I am physically and mentally

where God desires me to be, I will not waste time on false accusations.

2. I MUST NOT WASTE TIME ON FALSE ACCUSATIONS

- a. In verses 5-7, we see Sanballat send an open letter accusing Nehemiah of treason. This would have either been read aloud in public or posted for people to see.
- b. Of course, we cannot miss that the letter might imply that Sanballat and Geshem were willing to join Nehemiah in rebellion. This was to entice him out into their meeting to try to defend himself or give them a charge against him.
- c. Note that Nehemiah didn't try to prove his innocence. Instead, he said, "There is nothing to these rumors you are spreading; you are inventing them in your own mind."
- d. It can be really hard to not defend ourselves when people talk about us.
- e. Jesus didn't defend Himself at His trial.
 - i. (Isa 53:7) "Like a lamb led to the slaughter and like a sheep silent before her shearers, he did not open his mouth."
 - ii. He wasn't trying to stop them from crucifying Him.
- f. Instead of wasting his time and energy defending himself against accusations, Nehemiah simply called the lie what it was, stayed where God wanted him, and kept on doing what God had called him to do. In short, he ignored the distractions and the accusation.
- g. We must ignore distractions, accusations, and also ungodly advice.

3. I MUST IGNORE UNGODLY ADVICE

- a. Starting in verse 10, we see Nehemiah go to see someone he thinks is a friend.
- b. Shemaiah gave Nehemiah some advice that, on the surface, looks pretty good. Hiding in the temple might be a practical way to keep him alive if Jerusalem were to be attacked by Sanballat and crew.
- c. Two problems with the advice: it's cowardly and it's unscriptural.
 - i. Nehemiah knows that if he hides, he will get a bad reputation.
 - ii. He also knows that he, as a layman and not a priest, is not allowed to enter the temple.
 - iii. According to Num. 18:7, "An unauthorized person who comes near the sanctuary will be put to death."
- d. If anyone advises you to do something that is against the plain reading of scripture, ignore their advice. You can tell something is not from God if it contradicts His word.
- e. The whole purpose of Shemaiah's advice was to discredit Nehemiah.
- f. We must be careful that we know the scripture so that we can discern whether what someone tells us is true.
- g. Otherwise, you'll follow stupid advice like "Follow your heart," when scripture says, "The heart is more deceitful than anything else, and incurable — who can understand it?" (Jer. 17:9)
 - i. Nehemiah's act of self-preservation would have ruined his accomplishments.
 - ii. Our own acts of selfishness ruin our walk with Christ.
- h. By ignoring this unscriptural advice, Nehemiah preserved his integrity and was able to finish the task he was given. We must also ignore ungodly

advice and finish our task. And we must give glory to God along the way.

4. I MUST GIVE GOD THE GLORY

- a. (6:15-16) The wall was completed in fifty-two days, on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul. When all our enemies heard this, all the surrounding nations were intimidated and lost their confidence, for they realized that this task had been accomplished by our God.
- b. Nehemiah and his people were not boasting about their accomplishments. Instead, they knew, and **their enemies knew** that God had enabled this work.
- c. 52 days to build that wall was miraculously quick. It had been down for over 100 years.
- d. Knowing that God is at work will encourage and strengthen us. Note that Nehemiah kept praying during the various trials.
 - i. (6:9) But now, my God, strengthen my hands.
 - ii. (6:14) My God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat for what they have done, and also the prophetess Noadiah and the other prophets who wanted to intimidate me.
 - iii. This follows Nehemiah's pattern we have seen so far.
- e. We should continue to give glory to God in all things. Even if the enemy does not stop with attacks. Nehemiah tells that that Tobiah didn't stop.

CONCLUSION:

- Am I physically and mentally present where God wants me to be? In my occupation, my family, and most importantly, in my walk with Christ?

- Do I allow myself to be distracted by what others think or want me to do?
- Do I seek advice or counsel from the wrong places?
- Am I working for God and giving Him the glory?
- Will I surrender my life to Him today?

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