

FIVE SOLAS CHURCH

Sermon on Nehemiah 6:1-9

Preached by Christian McShaffrey
on the Sabbath of October 27, 2019

Foundational to the Christian worldview (i.e., the way Bible believers see the world), is a reality - a doctrine - that we call: THE ANTITHESIS. All that big word means is this: Behind all the scenes of life (even the seemingly insignificant ones), there is a constant war being waged between Kingdom of Light and the Kingdom of Darkness.

Good news: God knows all about it... because he himself declared the war... saying to the serpent in Genesis 3:15, *And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed...*

Bad news: Sometimes you will feel that Antithesis (i.e., feel caught up in it)... and not just when you are engaged in obvious spiritual warfare... preaching, praying, evangelizing, etc. No, sometimes you will just be going about your daily business... and the seed of the serpent will sneak in - attack you - and bring you to that same place Nehemiah was when he said (vs. 9), *O God, strengthen my hands.*

Back to the good news: God hears that prayer and delights to answer it. These verses prove it. God here strengthens Nehemiah to stay on task... in spite of the all enemy's efforts to distract him. Now - Nehemiah, of course, had doors and gates to install... but we all have equally-important tasks that needs to be done:

We have scriptures to read - Prayers to pray - Theology to learn - Children to nurture - Older children to guide - Lost souls to win - Unsettled souls to disciple - etc. So come, let's see how we too can stay on task... even in the midst of Antitheses.

1st The Antithesis is Always in Effect - vs. 1, *Now it came to pass when Sanballat, and Tobiash, and Geshem the Arabian, and the rest of our enemies, heard that I had builded the wall, and that there was no breach left therein; (though at that time I had not set up the doors upon the gates;)*

Forget about the enemies for a moment, and realize this: This was a great day! Nehemiah here announces the completion of the wall! He says, *I had builded the wall... and that there was no breach left therein...* Praise God!

This is why he left the palace in Shushan - this is what he had been working toward - this was a cause for great rejoicing - but NOT, of course, a cause for loss of focus because there was more to be done...

Nehemiah was honest enough to admit that: *though at that time I had not set up the doors upon the gates...* more work to be done... but this would be finishing touches compared to what had already been accomplished!

What a great day! A milestone! You have enjoyed such days, I trust: A child is born! A child is admitted to Communion. A student graduates! One of them gets married! Now we get a grandchild!

We have also enjoyed milestones as a church. The establishment of a church plant! The ordination of officers! The purchase of a new building!

In such times, yes, let us enjoy the satisfaction of having accomplished goals... but not to the neglect of this (main point): The Antithesis is Still in Effect.

Proven: vs. 1, *Now it came to pass when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian, and the rest of our enemies heard that I had builded the wall...*

They were still there... and still scheming. vs. 2, *Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono.*

They were also very persistent. vs. 4, *Yet they sent unto me four times after this sort...* vs. 5, *Then sent Sanballat his servant unto me in like manner the fifth time with an open letter in his hand...*

Point proven: The antithesis is always in effect... so here is the application: Never take your guard down. Always stay alert. How? Next...

2nd Adopt a Friend/Foe Mindset - Nehemiah did and it served him well. vs. 2, *Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono. But they thought to do me mischief.*

How did he know that? Because he knew these men. He knew them, more specifically, as enemies. Think all the way back to the beginning:

Nehemiah 2:19, *But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard it, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, "What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king?"*

Time HAD passed since then... and you know what they say, "Time heals all wounds..." so should Nehemiah have, perhaps, given them the benefit of the doubt?

After all, they were not laughing now... there was no indication in their invitation that they meant him any harm... *Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono.* The invitation sounds even more friendly in the end of vs. 7, *Come now therefore, and let us take counsel together.*

Brief aside: There are many modern Christians (they call themselves evangelical, authentic, intentional, etc.)... who probably would have accepted this invitation... thinking: "Wow, look at this open door of opportunity... these guys want to talk now... pray for me, that I might speak a word in season when I get to *the plain in Ono...*"

No - I'll pray that you don't get killed when you get to *the plain of Ono!* Brothers and sisters, if God himself placed enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent... then we are FOOLS to pretend that the enmity does not exist!

We need to adopt - and maintain - a friend/foe mindset. Jesus did. Here's just one example: Luke 12:4, *And I say unto you my friends...* stop, think, apply: Jesus knew who his friends were and he spoke to them as such. But the verse doesn't stop there...

And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do... Jesus also knew who his enemies were... and knew the evil design of their hearts.

Application: You need to have these two categories permanently fixed in your mind. Friend & Foe. You also need to evaluate every interaction - every invitation - according to these categories: Friend or foe? Nehemiah thought this way and his first thought was therefore this (vs. 2): *But they thought to do me mischief. Which they did... let's see how:*

3rd What Our Enemies Typically Do - Jesus anticipated that some enemies might commit murder: *Be not afraid of them that kill the body...* but - thankfully - not all enemies are so bold in their dealings.

SLANDER - That's what we see in this passage. It is a far more common form of attack and we need to be ready to deal with it. However, before we explore the specifics here, let me keep our discussion rooted in the Antithesis and first show you the Satanic source of slander.

The very name of the Devil - Satan - is connected to the sin of slander. His Hebrew title "hasatan" means "Adversary" and his Greek title "Diabolos" means the one who slanders and falsely accuses... So it should not surprise us to find him doing exactly that in scripture: Attacking God's people through slander/false accusation.

It should also not surprise us to find him doing that through men. Remember what Jesus said in John 8:44? *Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.*

Back to the text: *Sanballat, Tobiab, and Gesbem* (vs. 1) as well as *Gashmu* (vs. 6) were of their lying father the Devil, so that is what we find them doing: Lying.

vs. 6 tells us what the slander was: *It is reported among the heathen, and Gashmu saith it, that thou and the Jews think to rebel: for which cause thou buildest the wall, that thou mayest be their king, according to these words.*

Lie! Slander! Nehemiah had no such intention. Neither did his brethren, *the Jews*. But O, how easy it is to lie about someone's intentions! You know why? Because they are invisible! O, but that's right... *Gashmu saith it!* Even though this is the first time we hear of him - and even though this is the only time he is even mentioned in the Bible... he could apparently read minds and hearts!

He knew what Nehemiah was thinking... he knew what this whole wall project was about... he had it all figured out... and then told everyone else what to believe. What a lying devil!

The slander in vs. 6 was (obviously) about politics... and then it gets religious in vs. 7... but let me apply the political aspect first: Never be surprised when our enemies accuse us of sedition and rebellion.

They do this with the hope that some state power will step in and crush us (i.e., doing their devilish work for them). So just be aware of that (especially as we approach another heated campaign season).

Now to the religious slander in vs. 7: *And thou hast also appointed prophets to preach of thee at Jerusalem, saying, There is a king in Judah...*

The lie here was that Nehemiah had false prophets on his payroll... who were preaching messages intended to advance his personal interests. And yes, there are people who do that... you can listen to their hired-prophets on TBN and Youtube. But not Nehemiah! As we saw last week, he *feared God*... and would NEVER have done so wicked a thing.

Main point: Our enemies will attack us through slander. Be ready for it. Bear it well. And respond appropriately. One last point:

4th What We Should Do - Quick review first: Understand the concept of Antithesis - Realize that it is always in effect - Maintain a friend/foe mindset - Know what to expect from the enemy... now this:

Application 1: Learn to Say No - When Nehemiah perceived that his enemies sought to do him mischief, he just said, “No... I am not going to meet with you... I will not take counsel together with you.”

Do you know how to do that? You must! Illustration (perhaps far-fetched): What if CNN took notice of our church here and invited me for an interview? Think of it, I could be on all the TV's in all the airports - all the hotels - and all the bars! I would say, “No.” Because I don't trust them.

A more realistic illustration: What if some non-Christian friend invited you to a party... or to join their club? What if some liberal or Apostate Christian invited you to a party... or to join their club... or to go to their church's shut-in? Do you know how to say, “No.”? I do hope so.

Application 2: Stay On Task - Even if [big if] Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem were well-meaning... Nehemiah simply did not have time for this! So with his “No” came the explanation:

vs. 3, *I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?*

Having looked at the Bible maps, the work would have ceased only for a few days if Nehemiah had traveled to Ono... but can I suggest to you that even a few days are a few too many to waste?

Listen, we have work to do. No, we are not building a physical wall as Nehemiah was, but we are building something even better: A spiritual house. 1 Peter 2:5, *Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.*

There is worship to be conducted - Spiritual sacrifices to be made - A holy priesthood to be gathered into God's spiritual house (which is the church of our Lord Jesus Christ).

You (if you are a Christian today), are likened unto a *lively stone*... i.e., a small-but-vital part of the walls of the Kingdom of Christ... shall you then be found absent... missing... even for just a few days?

We need to stay on task. That, of course, assumes that we understand what our task is (but I'll save that for another sermon). Just commit yourself today to staying on the tasks that God has assigned you.

For as Nehemiah was so honest to admit this in vs. 3: *And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work...* Which, by the way did not mean: “O, look at me, I’m doing such a great job...” It rather meant this: “This is great task... we have so much to do!” And that can also be said about our spiritual work as the church.

So much to do... I hope you see that. I also hope you are beginning to see how the enemy’s attacks can distract us from our work... even sap us of our energy... so, finally, I say this:

Application 3: Seek God’s Strength - This is crucial! vs. 9, *For they all made us afraid, saying, Their hands shall be weakened from the work, that it be not done.*

This was the enemy’s design: To weaken God’s people so that their work would cease. To weaken God’s people (more specifically) through fear. And, O... FEAR can be a powerful weapon, my friends. “What will people think? What if people laugh? What if I get mocked? What if I get slandered? What if people believe the slander? What if I get arrested?”

Counter question: What if you ask God for strength?! What a great prayer we see at the end of vs. 9, *Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands.* You should pray that prayer... because God delights to answer it!

You think Nehemiah and his builders were living in tough times? Think of all the spiritual-builders who lived in NT times... who found the scriptures to be perfectly true (and not, mind you, only the happy parts): Romans 8:36, *As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.*

What if that became our experience? How would we feel about it? What would we say to it? Before we get creative, the very next verse tells us: *Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.*

Notice: Not just conquerers... but *MORE than conquerors* through our Lord Jesus Christ who conquered sin - put death to flight - and gave us the strong hope of everlasting life. Now... if that is who we are, then that’s how we should live:

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Some will say, “O, but I’m not!” To which I will respond, “Then ask God!” Pray: *O God, strengthen my hands...* and know that he will...

So that all of his people will be able to stay on task - as they seek his kingdom - with their hands - with all their hearts - and with this soul-strengthening hope: *we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.* Amen.