

# Don't Give Up

## – Nehemiah 3&4

### Suggested Questions from the Text

Read through the passage from Sunday. These questions are designed to help you consider the text as you read.

#### **Nehemiah 3 – *Malchijah son of Rechab, ruler of the district of Beth-haccherem, repaired the Dung Gate.***

- What role are you playing in building the church? How are you making use of the resources God has given you?
- What are the dangers of comparing the role you have in God's mission and the recognition you receive with others'?

#### **Nehemiah 4:1-6 – *When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became furious.***

- Have you experienced ridicule and mockery for your faith? How did you respond?
- Read Romans 12:17-21 – Where can we find justice in our suffering? How do we respond to our persecutors?

#### **Nehemiah 4:7-21 – *They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and throw it into confusion.***

- Have you been tempted to 'give up' on the church? ...faith? ...God? What helped you persevere?
- How can we remind ourselves of the persecution and struggles that many of our global family experience daily?

### Sermon Overview (Don't Give Up)

The book of Nehemiah is a picture that illustrates for us the great cosmic work of God - to make new that which was broken and corrupted by evil and sin. That's the mission of God - through His church, His people - as the walls lay in ruin. It would be through the people of God that restoration would come. Countless lives lie in ruin around this city - and we have a mandate to bring restoration, through reconciliation, through Jesus Christ.

#### Your Name Matters to God (chapter 3).

This chapter may seem like just a list of random names to us, but to God they are precious. This isn't just Nehemiah's story, it's also the story of Eliashib, Zadok son of Baana, Shallum son of Hallohesh and his daughters, and many others. Their contribution is so important to God that He ensures it gets recorded in the Bible. This record reminds us that unsung heroes will be honoured and celebrated before the host of heaven – and each part matters.

Don't strive for your name to be known by men. Be in peace that your name is known by God! Your work matters to God - but we slip into a pattern of comparison so easily. We look at others and their lives and we feel small and insignificant. Why would God care about what I do with my day? What possible good is my life doing in the world? Where's the recognition for my hard work? Comparison can breed unhealthy competitiveness and rob you of contentment and happiness. In this list, it is recorded that the ruler of the district of Beth-haccherem rebuilt the dung gate. It's incredible humility, it's Christlike humility – because they have caught the vision to glorify God. Whatever it is that you do, do it to the glory of God.

#### An Enemy of the Mission of God (verses 1-3).

When word got out about the rebuilding – Sanballat became furious. There is an enemy who is furious with the mission of God. He goes on to mock and scandalise their work. The attack reveals a great anxiety that this mission might succeed. If the Jews succeeded in rebuilding the wall – Sanballat's power would be diminished. Powers of darkness hate the light – as soon as there is evidence of light, there is a fierce reaction (**see Luke 6:7-11**). Times of advance for the Kingdom of God seem to always prompt a response from the enemy and a time of attack – but that should not put off the workers.

The enemy is skilled in their attack. It was not trained, skilled bricklayers rebuilding the walls - many would have felt out of their comfort zone, suffering the pains and aches of labour. They would have been tempted to give up – and the taunts and derision from Sanballat and Tobiah would have hurt them. This is an effective tactic of the enemy to destroy their faith – and a tactic that is used repeatedly. Even at the cross, Jesus was mocked and ridiculed (**see Matt 27:30-31 & 39-44**). The questions immediately attack our faith, to ridicule the truth and make us doubt our identity. Yet we can take comfort from the attempts of the enemy to make us doubt. 'I believe that your sonship is true when the devil tells you that it is not. If you were not a son of God, the devil would not be likely to utter any "if" about it.' (C. H. Spurgeon – *Sermon at The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington – 15 Nov 1883*).

#### Responding with Prayer and Perseverance (verses 4-6).

Their response isn't retaliation. It isn't to give up. Instead, they turned to God and prayed – to a personal God. When you are under attack – don't give up. Don't give in to lies and doubts, retreat or hide away. The first response we need is to pray to God. Without prayer, we tell God we can handle things without Him. We need Him - and so we need to pray.

Their prayer is not for mercy on their enemies, as we might expect. They are not retaliating themselves, but they are asking God to bring judgement on their enemies. Jesus models forgiveness and mercy – to turn the other cheek - but when the mission of God was being undermined Jesus also spoke harshly. Nehemiah is not avenging himself rather he is leaving room for God's wrath and judgment which is what comes to all who do not accept His mercy (**see Romans 12:17-21**).

#### From Mockery to Persecution (verses 7-21).

The enemy's plot intensifies – mocking, laughing at their efforts, did not stop them, and so the next method is to fight them – to kill and to terrorise. The enemy uses all means possible to stifle the mission of God. Our experience is more akin to verse 1, yet there is persecution across the world that matches verse 11. It starts with mockery, but as the building of the wall – the building of God's Kingdom – increases, so does the persecution.

Nehemiah responded with more prayer, perseverance and preaching of God's good news – and they completed their mission. Our weapons are not of the flesh, but are powerful to defeat and demolish strongholds. We are called to the Great Commission – and we must use the weapons we have been given – particularly prayer - to overcome opposition both locally and globally.