

Facing the Opposition

by Mark Rhodes

Mark Rhodes' sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing and confronting opposition within the church while remaining united and prepared for action.

Duration: 36:33

Scripture: Haggai 2:4, 1 Corinthians 15:58, 2 Corinthians 13:2, Titus 3:1, 1 Peter 3:15

Topics: "Opposition"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on their past experiences of being assigned to more militant topics. They then turn to the book of Nehemiah in the Old Testament to discuss facing opposition. The speaker emphasizes the importance of being dedicated to the work of God and being prepared to face opposition. They highlight the need to seal the borders and be ready to work, as well as maintaining the right attitude and being willing to combat opposition. The sermon also references verses from 1 Peter and Haggai to support these points.

Transcript

Facing the opposition, as I sat down and started working on this lesson, I know that in times past I think it's almost become a game between myself and the director to see how many odd ways I can present a lesson. Not necessarily material-wise, just structure-wise, but I started thinking about all these past lessons that I've done at several of these lectureships and I began to notice a pattern that for some reason he likes to assign me the more militant topics. And I think that's kind of the case with this one tonight.

If you would go ahead and turn in your Old Testaments to the book of Nehemiah, we're going to begin in chapter four with the lesson. But before we get to it, I'm going to set the stage a little bit. Nehemiah, of course, was the cupbearer to the king, and that, of course, meant that he was the one that basically tasted the food and the drink before the king took of it so that the king knew it wasn't poison.

Now, that's a very important position, as you can imagine, in a kingdom when all sorts of attempts were made on kings' lives. A very important position, very prominent position. But Nehemiah, it's said in chapter one, verse three, is told the remnant that are left of the captivity there in the providence are in great affliction reproach.

The wall of Jerusalem also is broken down and the gates thereof are burned with fire. That's the situation that Nehemiah was presented with while he's still in person. He sees the situation as being very dire

because of that one day while he's sitting there before the king, tasting the king's drink, tasting the food to make sure it wasn't poison.

The king noticed, Nehemiah, you don't look real happy while you're tasting this food to see if it's poison. Could you perchance tell me why you're not so happy? And you could see how that might bother the king a little bit when the guy tasting the food has a really worried look on his face. And Nehemiah tells him, says, this is what's going on back in my homeland.

This is what's happening in Judah. The city has been laid waste, the walls are torn down, the people are in disarray and it breaks my heart. What I need to ask of you is a leave.

I want to go back to Judah and I want to try to lead these people to do what they need to do. Of course, the king gives him the letters and he sends him on his way. That brings us, of course, to the lesson that we had this morning about leadership.

Nehemiah arrives in Judea. He goes about and takes those steps of seeing the situation, presenting a way of fixing that situation, inspiring the people to get to work and they get to work. They go about and they begin building, rebuilding those walls, what's needed to be done for the city.

But that's when we come to chapter four and we start talking about the opposition. The opposition that Nehemiah met. Now, my lesson is taken from the next three chapters.

And as you can imagine, I can't read those three chapters and still have enough time left to go through my points. So we're not going to have time to do that. So we're going to hit several different areas from these chapters and get the points of what we need to do when faced with opposition.

The second thing that I did whenever I started working on this lesson, I was thinking, facing the opposition. What is the opposition? That's the first thing we have to recognize. Who is it that you and I are going to be opposed to? Who is it that we're going to be out there fighting and confronting day in and day out? Who are the ones that to the remnant, that's what we're focusing on this weekend.

Who is the opposition to the remnant? I immediately thought of that all too famous saying, I've met the enemy and it is us. Sadly enough, and I think most people here would agree with me, within the last decade, more damage has been done to the church by internal fighting, internal problems than anything anybody from the outside ever tried to do. We have begun a situation of self-destruction in the church.

And it's because we are our own worst enemy. So what I hope to do tonight is to show for you, those that truly understand and feel part of the remnant, what we must do. There's no choice in the matter.

This is what we must do. The first thing that we do comes from chapter four, verses one through five. It says, But it came to pass that when Sanbalat heard that we built the wall, he was wroth and took great indignation and mocked the Jews.

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 the day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned? Now Tobiah the Ammonite was with him. He said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall. Hear, O our God, for we are despised and turn their reproach upon their own head and give them for a prey in the land of captivity and cover not their iniquity and let not their sin be blotted out from before thee, for they have provoked thee to

anger before the builders.

The first thing and probably one of the most important things we need to recognize, we are not the bad guys. In a politically correct world, those who are right are always chastised by those around them. Always.

We are not the problem. We are not the bad guys. It makes it real easy to assign names.

It makes it real easy to be called names from other sources. Oh, you're just being mean. You're being so elitist.

You don't have the love that Jesus showed. In essence, that's the same thing Sambalat was doing to the Jews in Nehemiah's time. And Ezra chapter 4, verse 4 says, Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah and troubled them in their building.

It's an easy thing to be discouraged. It's an easy thing to be sidetracked. When those around you are not with you, remember.

The principle I'm trying to get across here is that for the remnant. The opposition. Some of the people in the church.

Those are the people who are trying to stop us from doing what's right. Those are the ones who are trying to keep us from doing what God truly wants done. Trying to keep his church from being on earth the way it was supposed to be from the very beginning.

That is the opposition. In Job chapter 12, verse 4, I am as one mocked of his neighbor who called upon God and he answereth him. Just upright man is left to scorn.

We should know that those who stand for right are always going to be called names. The names have changed throughout the centuries. But they're always basically the same thing.

Of course, that was understood 2000 years ago. John chapter 15, verses 18 through 20. Jesus talking to his disciples.

What did he say? If the world hates you, you know that it hated me before it hated you. If you're of the world, the world would love his own. But because you're not of the world, but I've chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hated you.

Remember the word that I said unto you, the servant is not greater than his Lord. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.

It has always been the case that that remnant principle, those who are trying to keep and to do the will of God, are going to face the opposition, first of all, of those people with the name calling. And trying to discourage you from doing what you know you ought to do. But you have to recognize we are not in the wrong.

We are in the right. We're on the side of God and nothing can stop us. And as the remnant, we have to keep in our minds at all times, focus that idea.

I am on the Lord's side. And no one can stop. The second thing we have to do comes from verse 6, also of chapter 4. It says, So built we the wall, and all the wall was joined together into the half thereof.

For the people had a mind to work. I've always liked that verse. I've always liked that verse because it displays the right attitude.

Whenever we have to face the opposition, one of the things that we have to keep in mind is that we have to be ready to work. Facing opposition is not an easy thing to do. Facing anything is not an easy thing to do.

But especially when someone has been dug in so far as to try to stop you from doing what you know to be right and what you know that you should be doing, it's going to take work to combat that. Now, we're going to talk a few more points here in a second, some of the ways that can be done. But it begins with an attitude of willingness and readiness to work.

Haggai chapter 2, verse 4. Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord, and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedek, the high priest, and be strong, all you people of the land, saith the Lord, and work. For I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts. God's people, from the beginning of time, going all the way back to Adam and Eve, if you were considered a child of God, one thing that was always required of you was work.

The type of work, particulars of the work may have changed through the years, but always God's people have been a people ready to work. And if we wish to be part of this remnant principle, if we wish to truly be ready to confront the opposition, we have to be ready to work. 1 Corinthians chapter 15, verse 58.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. For as much as you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. Titus chapter 3, verse 1. Put them in mind to be subject unto principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work.

This is not something that is meant for a lazy people. And brethren, the remnant of God in any time period has never been lazy. There is always work to do.

All you have to do is open your eyes and look around at whatever congregation you may attend. There is work to do. I'd encourage, especially tonight, the young people of this congregation that are attending.

No matter what your age, no matter what your capacity, there is work that you can do. There are things that you can be a part of. There are things that you can do around the congregation, around the home, around anywhere, school.

You can be a part of the work of God. To those who are older than the young people, the only nice way I put it, the work never stops. You begin and you should always begin, if possible, growing up from a child on.

But the work never stops. And in fact, as you grow, as you increase, as you mature, that should enable you to do more work. And again, there's so much to be done.

And especially as you look at the situation and this weekend of all these lectures. In some ways, you think, well, it's kind of depressing because it's giving a picture that there's just so few faithful left out there. But at the same time, to me, it's a little bit uplifting.

To know that there are people out there dedicated to the work that's set before them, and that is the work of God. Number three, in order to face the opposition, and this one may be really hard for some people to swallow. Chapter four and verse nine.

Nevertheless, we made our prayer unto our God and set a watch against them day and night because of it. In order to face the opposition and do it correctly, we need to seal the borders. We must seal the borders.

You may remember, right after the tragedy of 9-11, there was a great cry made from the American people to seal the borders. To no longer let the foreigners in, and no, no, not to get too political here, to take the foreigners that were here and make them leave. Seal the borders.

Second Corinthians chapter 13, verse two. I told you before and foretell you as if I were present the second time and being absent now, I write to them which heretofore have sinned and to all other that if I come again, I will not spare. Brethren, if the remnant is going to survive and flourish, discipline must be enacted, and that's all there is to it.

We, as God's people, have missed the mark when it comes to discipline. We have totally failed as a people to make sure the kingdom of God was kept pure. You can't say it any other way.

You can't make excuses. That's the truth of the matter. If we truly wish to be the people that God wants us to be, we have to, first of all, seal the border and no longer let those who do not belong in the kingdom in.

And of course, I understand that God is the one that adds to the kingdom, but I'm talking about on the level of the congregation. Those who do not belong in the kingdom should not be let in for any reason. And number two, those that are already there and who do not belong need to be cast out.

Now, understand, that's to be done lovingly, as all discipline should. Timothy chapter 1, verse 20, of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme. Discipline is always enacted for the benefit of the person who's in the wrong.

It's always done so that they may know to correct themselves and return again to the fold to be pure and unspotted before God. That's the reason why. But we have failed to enact it.

Within the last 10 years, I know. I'm not sure I can go much farther back than my memory, but I can see it myself. We have allowed too much, and it has to end.

It has to end. Number four. Chapter 4, verses 12 and 13.

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. Therefore said I in the lower places behind the wall and on the higher places, I have sent the people after their families with their swords, their spears, and their bows. If we wish to face the opposition and do it right, we have to arm ourselves.

We have to take up the weapons. This is not going to be a congenial visit with people. This is not going to be a friendly chat.

That's why it's called the opposition. It's going to be a fight. And you and I need to understand that.

It is going to be a fight. And in order to do that, we must have the proper weapons with which to fight. Now, number one, the first thing, the first weapon to pick up is the mindset of Christ.

That's needed before anything else. Before we start talking about pulling out the sword of the Spirit and waving it around at people, I understand you have to have the mind of Christ. 1 Peter 4, verse 1, for as much then as Christ has suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind.

For he that has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin. Philippians 2, verse 5, let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. This mindset was humility and obedience.

And you can see that contextually. We must arm ourselves with this mindset, the mindset of Christ, the mindset of being humble before God, of being obedient to his word. And that's our first step to facing the opposition.

But then secondly, we have to take upon ourselves the word of God. Ephesians chapter 6, verse 17. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

And of course, probably the more familiar verse, 1 Peter chapter 3, verse 15. But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts and be ready always to give an answer to every man ask if you have a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear. We have to prepare ourselves with the word of God.

Arm ourselves so that we can provide that answer to whoever asks us why we're living the Christian life. Why is it that we're so happy? Why is it that you attend a church that's so small? Anybody ever had that question? I know I have. Somebody posing that to me.

Why do you like going somewhere that's so small? Size never mattered with God. That's the whole point of the remnant principle. Faithfulness does.

Number five, chapter four and verse 23. So neither I nor my brethren nor my servants nor the men of the guard which followed me, none of us put off our clothes, saying that everyone put them off for washing. In order to face the opposition, we must be prepared at all times.

Now, of course, the situation here at Nehemiah was a bit extreme. I would never suggest that no one changed their clothes except for washing them. But we need to understand that preparation is essential if we are to survive.

Second Timothy, chapter two, verse 21. If a man, therefore, purged himself of these, he should be a vessel unto honor, sanctified and meet for the master's use and prepared unto every good work. You know, there's that old saying, always a bridesmaid and never a bride.

You may have heard that. I think in the church, we kind of took that saying and changed it a little bit, because I believe that the mindset in the church over the last several years has been always preparing but never prepared. How many times have you gone to someone asking them to help in some area of work and they say, well, I'm just not ready to do that? Usually that's when you go to ask them to knock doors, honestly.

I'm just not ready to do that. Well, how about coming along with me on this Bible say, I'm just not sure if I'm ready. To do that.

Well, that may or may not be true. And I usually don't try to debate with somebody whether or not they're ready or not. But that's not the real problem.

The real problem is that they're not ready. If they're saying that, they're not prepared. And whether or not they're preparing or not really doesn't matter.

You can spend a lifetime preparing to do something. But at some point in time, if you want to get it done, you have to be prepared. Past tense.

Think of it in this light. Noah, that great man, Noah, sitting there working on that ark. What if Noah had always been preparing the ark, but never had the ark prepared? What would have happened when those rains started coming down? When the fountains of the deep opened up? When those floodwaters started rising up? You would have heard him say, not now, Lord, not now.

I'm not prepared. I've been preparing for all these years. But at this point in time, I'm not prepared.

That's the state with many Christians today. They feel like they've got a lifetime to prepare. But they're never at the point where they say, well, I'm prepared to work now.

I'm ready to go. Going back to 1 Peter 3, verse 15, what did he say? Be ready always to give an answer. That means you're prepared.

You're prepared with an answer when someone asks you. You're prepared to talk to them about the gospel when the subject comes up. You're prepared to go out and knock doors.

No excuses. You're prepared to do it. And as the remnant, we have to prepare ourselves and be prepared at all times to do whatever it is that needs to be done.

Number six. From chapter five, verses one through seven. And there was a great cry of the people of their wives against the brethren, the Jews.

For there were that said, we, our sons and our daughters are many. Therefore, we take up corn for them that we may eat and live. Some also there were that said, we have mortgaged our lands, vineyards and houses that we might buy corn because of the dearth.

Therefore, there were also that said, we have borrowed money from the king's tribute and that upon our lands and vineyards. Yet now our flesh is that the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children. And lo, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants.

And some of our daughters are brought into bondage already. Neither is it in our power to redeem them. For other men have laid have our lands and vineyards.

And I was very angry when I heard their cry in these words. Then I consulted with myself and I rebuked the nobles and the rulers and sent it to them. The exact usury, every one of his brother.

And I said a great assembly against them. Brethren, as the remnant, if we truly wish to face the opposition. We need to stop fighting each other.

The problem was here that here in Judah, people were in order to buy food, selling off everything they had to other Jews. That's why Nehemiah gotten such a so upset about this. Why are you doing this to your

brethren? But fortunately, we have people today who continue to fight each other in the church.

And that's so sad. Mark 3, verse 24. And if the kingdom be divided against itself, the kingdom cannot stand.

In order to be strong, in order to be a force, we must be united. First Corinthians chapter 1, verse 10. Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

We must stop fighting each other. More energy has been expelled in the last 10 years in correcting. Or better yet, that's not the right word.

More energy has been put proving another brother wrong than has ever been put into evangelizing the world. I think if you think about it, you'd agree with that. We in the church have turned inward, especially of light, to begin fighting and bickering among ourselves over some of the most minute issues, rather than facing ourselves with the real duty we have of going out and teaching the lost.

We must stop fighting each other. It must stop. Now, it starts, the answer to that, with you and me.

We may think about, you know, the big name preachers out there who are casting the stones back and forth, and they're the ones that fall. No, it begins with you and me, because we give them an outlet. We give them a reason to, and it has to stop.

We must be unified as the remnant in order to be a force to be reckoned with. And it can work. It can happen.

Number seven. From chapter six, verses one and three, one through three. Now, it came to pass when Sambalap and Tobiah and Geshum 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 into the gate, then Sambalap and Geshum sent to 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. And 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? In order to face the opposition, certain times we need to make a discernment.

And just like Nehemiah here, sometimes all that's needed is to ignore those that don't need to be answered. Nehemiah knew what was going on with Sambalap and his cronies. He knew what they wanted.

And I think his answer is perfect for the situation. Why should I stop working to come talk to you? Because the work is more important than me trying to do anything with you. Now, that's, of course, like I said, a discernment.

That's a discernment that you have to make. But sometimes it's best just to ignore someone. 1 Timothy 1, verse 4. Either give heed to fabled and endless genealogies which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith, so do.

Titus 3, verse 9. But avoid foolish questions and genealogies and contentions and strivings about the law, for they are impossible in vain. 2 Timothy 2, verse 23. But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strife.

Now, it's up to you and me to make the decision on when that situation is correct. But sometimes the best way to answer someone who themselves are a fool is to just ignore them. You can end up causing more problems trying to answer them in their folly.

Then 8, and lastly, from Tetra 6, verses 10 through 13. Afterward, I came into the house of Shimeiah, the son of Deliah, the son of Mehetubiel, who was shut up, and he said, Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us shut the doors of the temple, for they will come to slay thee. Yea, in the night will they come to slay thee.

And I said, Should such a man as I flee? And who is there that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in. And lo, I perceived that God had not sent him, but that he pronounced this prophecy against me, for Tobiah and Sambalat had hired him. Therefore was he hired, that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin, and that they might have matter for an evil report, that they might reproach me.

In facing the opposition, you also need to, number 8, understand the depths people will go to stop the work. Nehemiah understood that Sambalat and his friends are going to do anything they can to stop him from his job. They did not want those walls built.

They knew what that meant. And they were going to go to any depths possible, anything to stop him. Now, here the reference is given that it was possible that they had tried to seek his life, I think very possible.

But more directly, they were trying to find something that he could do, that they could use against him. Now think about that for a minute. They were trying to make Nehemiah do something that they could then use against him to defame his character.

Of course, Nehemiah's answer to that was simply, I'm just going to do what's right. Come what may, I'm going to do what's right, no matter what they try to do. But if you don't believe that people will go to outrageous lengths to stop something, think about Matthew 26, verse 4, and consulted that they might take Jesus by subtlety and kill him.

Let's keep in mind that in order to stop the message that Jesus was proclaiming, in order to stop the people from recognizing the Messiah, the Jews killed him. That's the lengths they went to. Matthew chapter 26, verse 59, Now the chief priests and the elders and all the council sought false witness against Jesus to put him to death.

Well, here we have an example. They were trying to lie in order to stop him. They will go to all sorts of outrageous behavior to simply try to stop the work.

And you think, I can't see that happening. Well, brethren, you need to wake up, frankly. If you think that there's not people out there willing to lie about you in order to stop the work that you're doing, you need to wake up.

You say, well, I know there's people out there that might lie, but I just can't imagine killing. Now, surely they wouldn't, you know, try to kill. Maybe not, but there is such a thing as character assassination.

And that goes on all the time, all the time. Do not be surprised at the lengths people will go to stop your work. Keep in mind, just like Nehemiah, it doesn't matter.

Just keep doing what's right and everything will be all right in the end. We need to prepare for the truth that the greatest foe we are facing is brethren who do not hold to the truth. That is truly the opposition the remnant will face in the coming years.

That means we need to get ourselves prepared to face this enemy. And it's going to be hard. It's going to be hard to face people that we may have worshipped with for years, that perhaps may be its family members, friends, loved ones.

But if they're standing on the other side of the fence, they are the enemy and they have to be dealt with. The elder who is not qualified is the enemy. The preacher who compromises what is right for any reason is the enemy.

The member of the Lord's Church who does not seek the kingdom first is the enemy. The Christian who does not live righteously in their life is the enemy. They're the opposition.

And if we wish for the church to grow and to be strengthened, we need to prepare to face them eye to eye, toe to toe and go to it. And that's all there is to it. Thank you.

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