

Standing Firm Under Attack

by Skip Heitzig

The story of Nehemiah and the rebuilding of the wall teaches us that God is behind all of His work, and that opposition is a normal part of doing God's work.

Duration: 41:42

Scripture: Nehemiah 4:1-21, Matthew 25:21, Hebrews 12:1, Revelation 22:20

Topics: "Spiritual Attack"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the negative mindset of some individuals who only focus on the negative aspects of God's work. He uses the example of Sandballot and Tobias in the book of Nehemiah, who constantly lower the morale of the people doing the work. The speaker emphasizes the importance of handling opposition and not giving up. He also shares a personal experience of attending a successful event despite initial doubts and encourages the audience to persevere. The sermon concludes with a mention of the speaker's previous interactions with Greg Lori and the success of a recent event in passing out new believer packets.

Transcript

This tape number is 0374 by Pastor Skip Heisig, and the title of this morning's message is Standing Firm Under Attack. It's good to be with you again. I spoke with Greg, Lori, he was on his way to the airport yesterday, going to Hawaii.

He needed the rest. But he said that Friday night alone they passed out 4,000 New Believer packets in one night. And they passed out 4,000 because that's all they had.

They ran out. They needed to go back and get more. It's just amazing.

I was here for Sunday and Monday night, and then I had to fly back home and came out last night. But I got a call from his secretary from the press box at Anaheim Stadium. And so at home in Albuquerque I got to hear some of the things that were going on, and it just sounded terrific.

God was doing a great work. Well, today, if you'd open your Bibles to Nehemiah chapter 4, the book of Nehemiah chapter 4, we'll begin our study. Let's begin with prayer.

Heavenly Father, we do thank you that you have brought us to this place that we might hear your word and give back to you praise that is so due your name. We ask that your Holy Spirit would be our teacher

and our guide. We pray, Lord, that we would not miss any lessons that you desire for us to not only hear but implement.

We offer ourselves to you, Lord, during this time. In Jesus' name, amen. In the book of Nehemiah, we see a story of people who are doing a work of the Lord.

And everything seems to be going right until something, just when everything's getting to the great place of finishing the task, goes wrong. Now, back in 1949, out at Edwards Air Force Base, there was an engineer by the name of Ed Murphy who was working on a project as an engineer, and something happened with the wiring, and it wasn't going right, and he got frustrated and blamed everything wrong on a technician that was working with him. And he said about the tech, he said, if there's something that could go wrong, he could do it.

And it became known as Murphy's Law. And since then, it has become very popular. In fact, it's hung at probably almost every business across the country as sort of a joke.

But there's the first three tenets of this law, Murphy's Law. The first one is, if anything can go wrong, it will. The second one is, nothing is ever as simple as it seems.

And third, everything that you do takes longer than you expect. Now, that's been popularized and put into different forms. I heard one called Murphy's Law of the Open Road, which if you travel by car a lot, you'll appreciate this.

The law says, if you have a long stretch of road upon which two cars are traveling anywhere along that road, and you place at random a one-way bridge on that road, it follows that, number one, the cars will be going in the opposite direction, and number two, they will always meet at the bridge. Then there's Murphy's Law of Flight, which says, if there are two planes that are scheduled to leave at the same time, you will be on the one that breaks down. I think I found Murphy's Law to be true in that one.

It's become popular because we notice something about life, and that is, it's not perfect. Things don't always go the way we planned. What you expect and anticipate doesn't always happen.

Things don't flow the way we'd like them to. And we see this in this chapter, actually in chapter three and chapter four, but there's a spiritual principle. Jesus said that the Lord makes the sun to shine on the just and the unjust alike.

And the rain falls on the just or the good and the evil. And there's a spiritual principle, more than Murphy's Law of negative things happening, there's a spiritual principle for believers, because things don't just happen for Christians. There's a reason for them.

There's something going on behind the scenes in the spiritual principle. As we open up the scene, we see there's a construction crew. They've got the cement trucks going and the shovels.

Of course, I'm modernizing it a little bit. But they're on a building project. And verse one gives us a glimpse as to what that project was.

But it so happened when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, that he was furious and very indignant and mocked the Jews. And he spoke before the brethren and the army of Samaria, and he said, Now, the chapter begins with a word that's not good when you're having great success. It's the word but.

Everything's going great but. Oh, you just don't like that kind of a word when things are flowing so beautifully. We see what they were doing.

In verse one, it says they were rebuilding the wall. Now, for the sake of background, let's find out why they're here. First of all, Nehemiah came to Israel after being in Persia for quite a number of years.

He was an important court official under King Artaxerxes. He was not born in Israel. He was born in Persia, although his parents and grandparents were of Jewish descent.

Because some years before, the Jews were taken captive from Jerusalem and shuffled across to Babylon. The Medes and the Persians subsequently took over, and Artaxerxes came to power. The Jews were allowed to return back to their land and rebuild the temple and the city, but Nehemiah stayed.

He decided not to go. Instead, he worked diligently as a cup-bearer for the king. You think, that doesn't sound like a very glamorous position, a cup-bearer.

But know that a cup-bearer was the closest individual to the king next to his wife. Because there were 15,000 people that surrounded Artaxerxes in his palace alone. And the cup-bearer was responsible for tasting the wine and the food that the king was to have.

So if somebody wanted to poison the king, the king would find out by the cup-bearer falling dead in front of him. And he'd say, well, I guess that's poisonous food, I better not eat it. It's a dangerous position, but a very vital one.

As he was working on the job, one day something he heard changed his life. There were some people back from Jerusalem. And so he said, well, what's going on back at the homeland? He said, Nehemiah, it's not good.

The walls of the city of Jerusalem have been broken down and the gates are burned with fire. Now, Nehemiah could have thought, well, that's too bad, I guess. I mean, they're there and I'm here, I can't do anything about it.

But instead, he began to weep. Because he thought, these are my people, they have no protection. Their walls are destroyed.

And he got on his knees and he began to pray. He confessed his sin before God and he asked God, what would you have me to do? And God put it on his heart to go to the king and ask permission to return and help these Jews building the wall. And so Nehemiah became the general contractor on this job as they rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem that had been broken down.

A couple things to notice about this project. First of all, it was a work of God. God was behind it wholeheartedly.

In fact, it was his plan that after 70 years, the Jews return and rebuild the temple in the city. A part of the job had been fulfilled. Under two men, they had already returned in mass.

Zerubbabel and Ezra led two groups of people that came and rebuilt the temple from the ground up. But the walls that surrounded the city were still not built, only the temple. The people were becoming discouraged.

They were becoming complacent. And so God raises up Nehemiah to step in where they had left off. And it was important that you build those walls because in ancient times when you have no walls around your city, you're basically giving your enemies an invitation.

You're saying, please come and attack us. Nehemiah knew that that was a grave, grave danger. So he, by God's prompting, came back.

The second thing to notice about this building project is Nehemiah didn't do it alone. Everyone in the city of Jerusalem got behind him and got involved. Notice verse 1, the phrasing.

It happened when Sanballat heard that we, plural, were rebuilding. It wasn't Nehemiah's job alone. All of the people got involved with him.

If we had the time, I'd refer you back to chapter 3 and we'd read through it. It's not an exciting chapter to a lot of people, but there's a lot of truth tucked into it. Chapter 3 is a list of names of the people who got involved and built the wall.

And I made a little list after reading chapter 3 of some of the people that were doing the work. First of all, the high priest. Can you imagine a high priest out there with a trowel and cement getting his hands dirty? He's not in the temple doing religious work.

Next to him, all the Levites were. The people who were the priests in the temple. And then on down the list were goldsmiths, jewelers, and then perfumers were out there building this wall of Jerusalem.

But the point is, is these were people from all walks of life, different backgrounds, all working together to get the job done. In fact, Nehemiah himself was not a religious leader. Ezra was a religious leader.

But Nehemiah was a businessman from Persia, and yet he's doing a spiritual work for God. I bring that up because I strongly believe in what I call layman's liberation. That people more and more today in the church are getting the vision of what God wants them to do instead of saying, well, that's for the professionals, the pastors, the evangelists, the singers.

They're becoming involved. In fact, some of the greatest work done for the kingdom of God is done by the behind-the-scenes people that you probably never, ever heard of. In fact, you read this list, and I've never heard of most of these people.

I can't even pronounce their names. But they all got together doing the work of the Lord. You see, when God does a work, He does not look for people with great ability.

He looks for people with great availability. He looks for people who say, God, I'll do anything. You just point the direction, and I'll do it.

The eyes of the Lord, the Scripture says, go to and fro throughout the entire earth, that He could show Himself strong on behalf of those whose hearts are loyal to Him. He'll look for anyone who will just say, God, send me, use me. That's what God is looking for.

In fact, the Scripture says, God has chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise. Paul made a remark to the Corinthians. He said, you see, brethren, how that there's not many mighty or noble who are called after the flesh, but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, the weak things, that no flesh would glory in His presence.

Now that's become my life verse. Every time there's a work that I feel God wants me to accomplish and I start arguing with Him, but God, how could I do that work? God reminds me, I've chosen the foolish things of the world. I go, great, I can do it then.

That should be encouraging to us because that way God gets the glory. After the work's all done, and you sit back and you look at it, and then you watch the people God has used, especially if you know them personally, you think, that's got to be God. Because I know Fred, and Fred couldn't pull that one off.

It had to be the Lord. And you see, God gets all the glory. He doesn't want to share His glory with anyone else.

And so that's the way God will often operate. You know, let's say you're a surgeon in a modern hospital in Southern California and you have all of the best tools to work with. And you perform a surgical operation.

And people think, well, that's what He's supposed to do. No big deal. He's trained to perform that way.

But take that surgeon away from his modern instrumentation and put him in a jungle somewhere and give him a Swiss Army knife and a pair of tweezers. And say, now operate, doc. If he could do it, his skill would be more noticed than in the first situation.

You'd think, what a fabulous doctor. Because he had such poor tools, but he did such a great job. You see, the skill of the worker shines when he's limited.

Or take a modern building and compare it to an old one, an ancient one. Take a modern hotel in Orange County and compare it with the Taj Mahal. You think, well, they poured a slab here in Orange County and they took a big crane and they got these beams.

But the Taj Mahal, they didn't have those modern conveniences. They did more with less. And so we sit back and we still marvel at the pyramids and the Taj Mahal and the ancient structures because way back then, the craftsmanship that it took to pull off a building like that still shines.

And that's how God works. God will do his work with not the tools with the greatest ability but greatest availability so that when the work is done, you stand back and think, wow, the craftsmanship that God put into this using such meager tools to pull it off. And then God gets all the glory.

And so it wasn't just Nehemiah. In fact, Nehemiah was just a businessman, but it was all these people who were together working with him. You see, each one of us this morning in this room has been given a ministry by the Lord, if you know him, if you're a believer.

You're called somewhere on the wall to build it up. There's some portion, some task that God has for you. You might be an executive, you might be a blue-collar worker, you might be a mother, you might be a single mom, you might be a housewife, but God has given you a ministry.

For years, I worked here in Southern California in some of the local hospitals in radiology. And I used to bring my Bible into work every day. I was walking to work one day, and there was a young Christian I worked with.

He said, do you ever want to go in full-time ministry? I smiled at him and said, I already am. I'm in full-time ministry, and so are you. And there's some people that wouldn't darken the door of a church that live and work right here.

And if you'd only see yourself as being called permanently full-time into the ministry, it could revolutionize how you work. All people from all walks of life here building this wall, doing their part. And some of you might be thinking, yeah, but I'm not all that important.

I mean, I don't have time to build the wall. I don't have time to be involved in kingdom work. I'm a housewife.

I'm a mother. How glamorous is that in the kingdom? Well, it all depends on how you look at it. Alan Redpath told the story of a woman in his church who had a plaque over her kitchen sink that read, Divine Service conducted here three times daily.

She saw her commission is from the Lord, and she put all of her heart into it. See, there's a lot of people in the church who think, I'm not talented enough. I'm not gifted enough to do God's work.

I'm not an evangelist. I'm not a singer. I'm not a speaker.

I'm not this or that. Could I be of any value? Yes, you can. There is a portion of the wall that only you can build.

Down in South America, in Argentina, when it was mandatory for everyone to get into the service, at one of the induction centers, a man came and he was complaining. He said, what good am I? I have no arms. And the commanding officer looked at him and he said, you see the guy pumping water on the hill? You walk up there and tell him when the pail is full.

He's blind. You don't have arms, but you have eyes. He has arms, but no eyes.

Put you guys together, you'll be a great team. You can be used. You're valuable.

God is a place for everybody in the kingdom. And that's what's beautiful about this scene, is that here you see everybody pitching in together. Goldsmiths, perfumers, high priests, Nehemiah, and they're all doing the same work.

And it reminds me of what Paul said in Corinthians. He said, the eye can't say to the hand, I don't need you. The head can't say to the feet, I have no need of you.

But those weaker parts of the body become more necessary. In fact, I'd venture to say that the most important parts of your body are not the parts that you spend most time on. You probably don't wake up in the morning thinking, I wonder how my pituitary is this morning.

It's those hidden parts that do so much, but they all pitch in and get the job done. So, they're rebuilding the wall, but we go on and we say that they're resistant to the work. In verse 1 it says, it so happened when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he was furious, very indignant, and he mocked the Jews.

And he spoke before his brethren and the army of Samaria and said, what are these feeble Jews doing? Will they fortify themselves? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they complete it in a day? Will they revive the stones from the heaps of rubbish, stones that are burned? Now Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him and he said, whatever they build, even if a fox goes up on it, he will break down the stone wall. They start rebuilding the wall and as soon as they get to a certain point, it would seem like Murphy's Law of Construction starts coming into play. Opposition comes.

People resist it. And you might think, now wait a minute, wait a minute. Didn't you just say that this was God's work? See, that's the whole point.

It was attacked because it was God's work. It was attacked because Nehemiah was in the will of God. The people were doing exactly what God wanted them to do.

But see, there's a lot of us who think, well, if it's God's will, there's going to be no resistance. It's going to flow smoothly without any hassle. Baloney.

They're out there exactly where God wanted them to be and they're opposed. And I'm convinced that if Nehemiah would have gone anywhere else in the empire to build a city or build a wall, he wouldn't have been hassled. But he happened to be in the center of God's program, Jerusalem.

He happened to be right smack dab in the middle of God's will. And because of that, he was attacked. You see, you have an enemy.

And your enemy, the devil, hates God and hates those who do the work of God. There's a little track called Four Spiritual Laws. I think it begins by saying God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.

That's true. The flip side of that is the devil hates your guts. And he's got a miserable plan for your life.

And anytime you decide to take up the work of God and to be involved in the work of God, if you step into that arena, be prepared to pay the price. And the more effective you are, the heavier the price you have to pay. It was Charles Finney, an evangelist early in this century, who often spoke about the work of God and the work of the devil and how they're always fighting for the souls of men.

And after one of his services of preaching, somebody came up to him and said, Mr. Finney, do you really believe in a literal devil? And Finney looked at him and said, you try opposing him for a while and you'll see if he's real or not. See, all it takes is a few blows from the old fella to know, hey, this is real stuff. He was being pounced around and he believed in spiritual warfare.

Anytime you invade God's, excuse me, anytime you invade the enemy's territory with the word of God, you can expect flack. It's not going to be easy. He's not going to take it lightly.

Back in Albuquerque, we decided to do a new strategy from just Christian radio. We have our show on Christian radio, but we thought, now if I was an unbeliever, would I listen to Christian radio? Probably not. I'd listen to some of the modern stations, the secular stations.

So we thought, let's buy time. 30-second spots, 60-second spots. We called them God spots.

And we have a bed of music and we have a short, to-the-point hook, a gospel message, and a phone number for people to call. We've got a lot of response. Some good.

But lots of it where people say, what right do you have to come on our station and put your message on our station? You see, when you invade Satan's territory, he's not going to take it lightly. And so Nehemiah's building the wall and he gets hassled because of it. Paul the Apostle put it this way.

He said, pray for us because a great door has been opened, but there are many adversaries. And they always work together, don't they? God opens a great door, and as soon as a great door is open, the adversaries come in for attack, thus we need prayer. Now a word of caution.

If this morning you are a believer who is complacent, and you're not really serious about the work or the will of God, you're content to watch others get involved and you're content to just sit back and say, well, that's really nice, then you're really no threat to the enemy and you probably won't experience much opposition. But the moment you become aggressive and you say, I'm going to put the armor of God on, I'm going to take God's work seriously, I'm going to follow Jesus with all of my heart, don't expect hell to give you a standing ovation. Satan will not take it lightly.

He's going to mount up with his legions and he's going to come against you. Not to worry, because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. And the gates of hell will not prevail against you.

Jesus promised that. But it doesn't mean it's going to be smooth sailing all the way through. You can expect some opposition.

And as I said, that's important because many people say, if I am experiencing opposition while I'm serving God, I must not be in the will of God. Well, the reverse is true. It might be one of the best indicators that you're smack dab in the middle of the will of God.

You can tell a person's calling and his life by not only his friends but his enemies. Now, if you're being opposed by God's people, watch out. If the attacks come from outside God's people and they're trying to slow you down and pour water on what God is calling you to do, that's one of the best indicators that you're smack dab in the middle of God's will.

John Wesley was riding his horse and he was worried, God, maybe I'm not in your will, maybe I'm not experiencing the fullness of your will and your work for my life. As he was praying that, as the story goes, somebody who recognized him and hated him started throwing rocks at him. He said, there's that Wesley, I hate that preacher.

And he started throwing rocks at him. Wesley, it said, got off his horse, got on his knees, and said, thank you, Lord, that I still have found favor with you. Spurgeon said, the devil never kicks a dead horse.

Only those who are really out doing the work of God. Now, I have a letter I'd like to share with you, a portion of it, from a missionary to his friend back in the United States. The missionary is from New Guinea.

He's writing to his friend in America concerning spiritual warfare. He says, man, it's great to be in the thick of the fight, to draw the old devil's heaviest guns, to have him at you with depression, discouragement, slander, and disease. You think, this guy is nuts.

Read on. He says, for the devil doesn't waste time on a lukewarm bunch. He hits good and hard when a fellow is hitting him.

And you can always measure the weight of your blow by the one that you get back. Boy, that revolutionizes the whole thinking of spiritual warfare. I wouldn't be receiving this were it not for where I'm at doing the work of God.

Now, a word of caution. Don't label everything spiritual warfare. There's some people that see the devil behind every bush.

And something doesn't go their way and somebody doesn't like what they're doing, they think, the devil. Not necessarily. You see, be careful that you're being persecuted for the right reasons.

Jesus said, blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. There's a lot of believers that are persecuted for weirdness' sake. Or for being obnoxious.

And when they get hassled, people think, well, I'm suffering for God. No, you're not. You're suffering because you were weird.

And so make sure it's coming from the right place. From the right quarters. Notice in verse 4 the nature of this opposition.

It was not physical, it was verbal. It says in verse 1, he was furious, very indignant, and he mocked the Jews. The criticism was verbal criticism.

Now, we've all met sand ballots and Tobias. They're the kind of people who come every time you feel like you've got some kind of a vision or plan from God. And you verbalize it.

You think, you know, this is a great idea I think the Lord has given me. I want to get involved in this. And they'll sit back and go, it won't work.

It'll never happen. You can't do it. And I think that God's work has been hindered more by verbal criticism even from within the church than anything like physical persecution.

I once heard of an optimist who lived next door to a pessimist. The optimist saw the good side. The pessimist, of course, saw the negative side.

One day, it was a sunny day. The optimist looked outside and he said, what a beautiful sunny day it is. Thank the Lord.

The pessimist said, well, it looks like a heat wave to me. I think my crops will probably be burned up. One time it was a rainy day and the optimist got out and he said, beautiful, wonderful rain, isn't it? The pessimist said, if it doesn't stop, all my crops will be washed away.

So the optimist thought, I've got to break this guy of his criticism all the time. So he took him on a hunting trip. He says, I'm going to take him duck hunting and I'm going to show him the new dog that I got.

And this dog, of course, had been trained to do tricks that no other dog on earth could perform. He thought, this will break the pessimist once and for all. So they got in the boat.

They were out fishing on the lake. The ducks flew by and he pulled out his gun, bam, shot a couple of them down. Then he was waiting for this moment.

And so he said to his dog, go get him. The dog jumps out of the boat, runs on top of the water, over to where the ducks are, takes them in his mouth and comes back. The optimist folds his arms and with that proud smile says, well, what did you think of that? And all the pessimist could say was, can't swim, can he? Ever meet a person like that? That's all they see, especially in God's work, is the negative side of it.

Always critical. Well, here's Sandballot and Tobias are out there lowering the morale verbally of the people doing the work. And that stuff wears on you after a while.

If that's all you hear all the time, it takes the wind out of your sails. You just want to give up, you just want to quit. But at the same time, as believers, we need to know how to handle this opposition.

And we see how Nehemiah handles it. Look in verse 4 and 5. First thing he does, he takes it before God. Hear, O our God, for we are despised.

Turn their reproach on their own heads and give them as plunder to a land of captivity. Do not cover their iniquity and do not let their sin be blotted out from before you, for they have provoked you to anger before the builders. Now, I admit this is a pretty gutsy prayer.

I don't know that I've ever prayed a prayer like that for my enemy. Lord, smoke them. Don't forgive them.

But the point is this. Nehemiah didn't argue, didn't debate with them. He didn't enter into anything himself.

He went right to God. That was his first step. First thing he did is take it to prayer, which is so unlike human nature.

Human nature wants to retaliate, does it not? When somebody cuts you off on the freeway, what do you feel like? You feel like chasing them all through Orange County into Riverside County and hunting them down. It's human nature. To forgive is supernatural, not natural.

I heard of a truck driver who went into a cafe and ordered ham and eggs, coffee and orange juice. He was sitting down for breakfast, having a nice, quiet, leisurely breakfast. There were three motorcyclists, three bikers who pulled up looking for a fight.

They walked in and saw the truck driver and they thought, this is great, this is perfect. One of the bikers walked over, grabbed a plate of ham and eggs and just pushed it all over his shirt, down the front of him, waiting for the truck driver to jump up and want to fight. But he didn't.

He wiped it off. Another biker took the coffee, another took the orange juice, poured it on his head, thinking this is going to do it. Didn't do it.

In fact, the truck driver got up, smiled, paid the bill and left. Didn't retaliate. The bikers were looking out at each other and they said, not much of a man, is he? And the waitress who overheard that was looking out the window and said, not much of a truck driver either, he just ran over three motorcyclists.

See, we clap because we can handle that. We like that. That's us.

It's human nature. And I bet you Nehemiah was thinking, I'm going to go down there and punch their lights out. But instead of doing that, he took it not to them, but to the Lord.

He knew that the best use of his mouth was prayer. Not another verbal attack. He knew that if he could kneel before God, he could stand before anything.

And I love that old phrase that said, Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees. And Nehemiah took it before the Lord. That was his first step of victory.

Secondly, he identified himself with God's purposes. Did you notice the end of verse 5, how Nehemiah phrased that prayer? He says, Do not cover their iniquity. Do not let their sin be blotted out from before you.

But notice this. For they have provoked you to anger before the builders. Did you see how he's thinking? He didn't say, God, get on their case, because they have made me mad.

But Lord, they provoked you to anger. You see, he was doing God's work. He was thinking correctly.

If I'm doing the work of God, and they're hassling me, God takes it personally, they're hassling Him. Can you imagine how shocked Saul of Tarsus must have been as he was on the way to Damascus? And he was out there to hunt down Christians. And as he was on the way to persecute them, he got knocked off of his horse, and he saw that light shining on him.

And the voice of Jesus came and said, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? I'm sure he thought, I'm not persecuting you. I'm out to get them. But he recognized that to persecute them is the same as persecuting Him.

Jesus identifies with His people. Do you know how encouraging that is to me? It means that when I'm in the will of God doing the work of God, and I'm opposed by somebody for doing that, God takes it personally. And I don't have to sweat it.

That's why He's my refuge. We sing, He's my hiding place. Remember to hide behind Jesus.

The enemy would love you to get out there in the flesh and get frustrated when you're opposed and say, come on! Because he'll nail you. But if you take it to God and you identify with God's purpose, you've got nothing to worry about. Hey, Lord, they're going to make you mad.

I'm kind of worried about them. Because they're getting you angry. They're provoking you.

He hid behind the Lord and identified with His purpose. And third thing He did was He kept going. Look at verse 6. And so we built the wall.

I love that. He didn't say, and so we got discouraged and we quit. Ah, so we built the wall.

And the entire wall was joined together up to half its height where the people had a mind to work. Did He quit? Did He throw in the towel? No, He kept going. He thought, I've taken it to God.

I've identified with God. Hey, boys, keep the cement coming. Let's build this wall and do the work of God.

And you know, whenever you decide to do God's will, to enter into the arena of service to the Lord, you can expect the enemy to come along and say, give it up, buddy. Quit. You'll never do it.

Maybe somebody else could, but you can't. And you know what you do? You just keep going. Don't you think Paul the Apostle heard those kind of voices and that discouraged him in all of his life? This is what he wrote.

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed. We are perplexed, yet not in despair. Therefore, we will not give up.

The enemy would love to discourage you this morning from doing the work of God. Jesus said to Peter, Peter, Satan has desired that he would sift you as wheat, but I prayed for you. And that's Satan's desire for every one of you, to sift you like wheat, to make you Alka-Seltzer Christians.

You know what that is? It's the kind who have lots of fizz at the beginning, but fizzle out later on. No, God wants you to keep persevering and going on and though you're opposed, take it to the Lord. Hide behind His purposes and then just keep going for it.

I'm so glad that Columbus was not discouraged from going to the new world. Everybody thought he was nuts. They thought, Chris, it's impossible.

You'll fall off the earth. It's flat. Any scientific mind knows the truth.

He said, no, I'm going to go for it. I'm going to find the new world. And as he was sailing out, even his own crew members were discouraging him.

At one point, they threatened to kill him if he didn't return home. He had one response for it. Sail on.

And that's all he said and he arrived in the new world. And they kept going and they did the work. I think it'd be fair to read on just a couple of verses before we quit because it sounds pretty good so far.

We think, well, that's neat. Next time I get hassled, I'll just pray and I'll take it before the Lord, identify with His purposes and keep going. But that won't stop the enemy.

You might have one victory, but He'll keep coming at you and that's what we read about also in this chapter. In verse 7 we read, Now it happened when Samballot, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, the Ashtodites heard that the walls of Jerusalem were being restored and the gaps were beginning to be closed, that they became very angry. And all of them conspired together to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion.

The enemy kept coming and what was the recourse of the believers? Next verse. Nevertheless, we made our prayer to our God and because of them we set a watch against them day and night. Now look down at verse 21.

So we labored in the work and half the men held the spears from daybreak until the stars appeared. They were attacked, they prayed. They identified with God, they kept going.

They were attacked again, they prayed. They identified with God, they kept on going. We need to learn to catch the second wind.

If you run or do exercise, you know what that is. There's a time where you just get fatigued and all of a sudden you get a second wind and you can keep going. And we need to learn that Christianity is not a hundred yard dash but a marathon.

We keep at it. We run the race that is set before us with patience and endurance looking to Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith. You say, why is that so important? I'll tell you why.

Because one day you're going to stand before Jesus and won't it be great to hear him say, well done good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Lord. At that point all of the hassle you had here will be worth it.

To hear those words. A friend of mine from the Billy Graham Association, Roy Gustafson, was speaking to a young lady that I happen to know and she said, boy I can't wait for Jesus to come back. I hope he would come back today.

And he said, well I agree with you. I would love the Lord to come back soon but I hope for your sake young lady that he waits a while. She thought, what? Why would you say that? He said, because this is the only opportunity you'll have to be persecuted for the gospel.

You'll never pass out one tract in heaven. This is the only opportunity for serving God that you have. And you have it now.

And so you keep going. And yes Jesus is coming soon but until then, you've got time to serve him. These are days of opportunity.

There was a group of minstrels in Europe who were traveling around from town to town. They were just performing their play. They would sell tickets, collect the money, put on the performance.

But the economy in Europe was drying up so a lot of people wouldn't pay the money for the ticket. And so one night before the play, the group got together. They were a bit discouraged.

One of the young kids said, you know what? I'm ready to quit. I've been doing this now for months. I've been putting my whole life and energy into this.

Did you see the crowd last night? Just a handful of people came. And look outside. It's starting to snow.

There will be fewer people tonight. I'm just for bagging the whole thing and quitting. Give the people their money back.

And all of them pretty much agreed. Yeah, I'm ready to quit. Let's just cash this in.

They asked the advice of an older gentleman who was part of their repertoire. They said, what do you think? He said, well I think we ought to go for it. We ought to go on tonight and give it our best.

Because we can't castigate the people who have come for the people who have not come. We owe it to them. Let's just put our heart into it.

And so they went out that night. It was the best performance they ever had. They felt good about it.

They kept going. But at the end of the evening, the older gentleman who gave them the good advice ran up with a little note in his hand. He was excited.

He said, sit down. You've got to listen to this. And he opened up a short note that simply said, great performance.

It was beautiful. Signed, your king. The king of the kingdom in which they were performing in that night happened to be there among that small crowd.

They were ready to quit. And had they quit, they would not have had the affirmation of the most important person in the kingdom, the king. Now you're building on the wall.

Whatever portion God has called you to build, you're building. It doesn't matter how good you are, how talented or how gifted you are. The important thing is the king is watching you.

And for him to say one day, well done good and faithful servant, it's worth putting our heart into it. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the high calling of being a Christian. We thank you, Lord, that we are performing as Christians works of God.

We know that as we do that, we're going to be hassled and we're going to have resistance. But at the same time, Lord, we take them all to you and we pray that next time we have this opposition and affliction,

we would remember that our recourse is not ourselves, our flesh, or our own strength, but we bring it before you. We'd identify with you and then we wouldn't give up.

We'd sail on, Lord, knowing that our king is watching. And that's really the most important one is you. Not what anybody else would say about how good we perform or what we do, but how we did before your eyes.

And so, Father, I pray for your people that we'd all be encouraged to go on and to do your work to not give up in Jesus' name.

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