

Sermon Series Nehemiah – Neh. 4:

(Regula A. Brandle, St. Paul's, Oct.4/2009) **Lessons on Being on God's Work Crew**

Isn't it different to listen to the OT readings from the book of Nehemiah from the audio Bible?

No offence to any of our skilled Scripture readers, but it is a nice change. Especially if you consider all the many strange names in this book that should be pronounced properly! 😊

Now, in case you have not been with us for the past 3 Sundays...we are currently in a sermon series on the biblical book of Nehemiah.

And today we are going to look at chapter 4.

But before we dig into today's passage, let me briefly recap of what has happened so far:

Nehemiah - a Jew who was exiled in Babylon and worked as the cupbearer to king Artaxerxes around 430 BC – responded with prayer and action when he heard about the sorry state of the city wall in Jerusalem.

Apparently the wall was broken down and the gates had been burned with fire.

Nehemiah courageously asked the king for a leave of absence in order to travel to Jerusalem to investigate the situation for himself and rebuild the wall.

When Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem and had done his investigation, he convinced the officials in Jerusalem to rebuild the wall.

And so the people began the re-building under Nehemiah's leadership.

That's when we enter chapter 4.

Now I would like you to open your pew bible on page 344 and look again at chapter 4. When you listened to the audio reading or are looking at the text again right now..... is there anything that jumps out of the text to you?

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Well, the focus of today's sermon is "Lessons in Being on God's Work Crew." Of course, there are so many treasures in this passage (as in the whole book of Nehemiah) that I could also just focus on leadership, prayer, spiritual warfare or community life, just to name a few that popped into my mind!

I must say, Nehemiah is one of my favourite books in the Bible.

It is so practical, so tangible and so encouraging, and packed with truth and principles for anyone who wants to learn more about following Jesus!

Lessons in Being on God's Work Crew – here they are:

1. Opposition is inevitable!
2. Prayer and Work should never be separated!
3. Unity between those involved is crucial!
4. Personal Cost is part of the deal!

Opposition is inevitable!

It is not really funny, but when reading this chapter it is somewhat amusing of how it says 2 times” when Sanballat and Tobiah heard....they became angry” (verse 1 and 7).

After reading the first two chapters in Nehemiah (2:10, 2:19), and how Sanballat and Tobiah responded then to what God wanted to accomplish through Nehemiah, it doesn't come as a surprise, does it?

God was up to some great plans and guess what? Some people didn't like it!
And nothing has changed in this matter ever since then!

If you are serious about following Jesus, obeying his voice, offering yourself to be used by God and do it, opposition will arise. Guaranteed!

It is not a question of “if” opposition will happen, but only about “when it will and how it will”!

I could give you a number of examples, however, if you have not experienced opposition in being on God's work crew, you need to ask yourself:

1. Am I actually listening to God's voice and follow his promptings and offer myself as a conduit through which God can accomplish his good goals?
2. Am I possibly blind to the greater reality of what's going on when I experience opposition? (whether that is criticism, discouragement, conflict, roadblocks, etc.)

When it comes to opposition, criticism, distractions, discouragements, discord and so on, we need to remember one huge big fact.

Our fight is not against flesh and blood, but against Satan and his demonic forces that will use flesh and blood to oppose the Lord's work. (see Eph.6:12)

In other words, Nehemiah's battle was not primarily against Sanballat or Tobiah. Sanballat and Tobiah were just carrying out the dirty work of the Devil, whose main objective it is to thwart God's good plans.

We really need to get this right!

If we think that opposition against what God wants to do through us is just the work of a mean human being, we don't get it.

Our real fight is against a much bigger enemy. It is Satan and his cohorts, who are constantly trying to undermine what God wants to do.

And the reason why it is so important to remember this is: You will get burned, if you want to fight such a spiritual battle with human tools!

If we focus on the visible enemy only and forget the invisible enemy, we will likely start to trust our own resources and that will lead to defeat!

Opposition is inevitable if you are part of God's work crew. Don't be afraid, but be aware.

The second lesson is

Prayer and Work should never be separated!

It could have been so easy for Nehemiah to get discouraged, to get angry, to vow retaliation, to give up, to believe the enemies - right?

I am serious!

But what did Nehemiah do?

The first aspect is found in v.14a where Nehemiah says to the people:

"Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord who is great and awesome."

What is he saying?....Remember to trust the Lord in your work and your battles!

But that's not all.

Nehemiah also prayed and asked God to fight the enemy for him!

(PS: Nehemiah was not requesting personal vengeance but vindication for God's people.)

I am not saying anything new, but let me repeat it:

Prayer is THE weapon and defence for God's work crew.

Like the people working on the wall carrying their tool in one hand and the weapon in the other hand, so are we to hold our tools in one hand and the weapon of prayer in the other hand!

All the workers had a weapon. They didn't just tell a few willing volunteers to be the fighters and the rest went on with building.

Let's put it this way.....The strength of St. Paul's as God's work crew here on Stony Plain Road is directly linked to the priority we all give to prayer, corporately and individually.

I can't say it any differently. And I wished others would say of us...this is a praying church or prayer is at the heart of all they do at St. Paul's. But I think we have some ways to go on that one.....

How important is prayer in your life and work?

The third principle is this:

Unity between those involved is crucial!

Can you imagine the effects if the people working on the wall would have carried out internal squabbles while trying to accomplish God's plans?

When we look at it from that perspective, I am sure, it is not just me who would think that they were crazy!

But what a refreshing example we get here (like in chapter 3):

People worked together in unity and followed the Leader's guidance and wisdom instead of squabbling, fighting and arguing with each other.

I certainly cannot find any hint of individualism but a sense of community and unity.

I am as bold as to say that incredible things are possible when we work in unity, focussing on God's strength!

The last lesson I want to draw our attention to is:

Personal Cost is part of the deal!

Did you notice what is said in the last few verses and what is implied by that?

There were no bystanders, or anyone sitting on the fence watching how others worked.

Not everyone did the same kind of work, but all worked.

And the work was costly.

It was tough, it was demanding, it meant giving up some creaturely comforts, and it was potentially dangerous.

> v. 21ff.

Nehemiah could have had the best plans, the best organizational abilities, but without the sacrificial attitude of everyone involved, it would have been useless.

When we decide to follow Jesus, it means pouring out your life for whatever God is calling you to do. Sometimes more than at other times, but it is costly to follow Jesus. It certainly was never meant to be a drive in the back seat.

This chapter has been encouraging and challenging to me, and I hope it does the same for you as a member of God's work crew:

The fact of opposition.

The priority of prayer.

The importance of unity.

The involvement of sacrifice.

Let's pray.

Amen.